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September 24, 1895.

No. 948.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 cents.

Vol. XXXVII.



OR, WILD KID'S TEXAN TALLY.

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AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL'S CRACK-SHOT
PARD," "BUFFALO BILL'S BOY MASCOT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

WILD KID THE TERROR.

"THEY mean mischief from their actions,
for they seem to be preparing to ambush
some one. I'll get a closer look at them, for

BUFFALO BILL LEVELED HIS WEAPON, SAYING QUICKLY: "I'LL REDUCE THE
MAJORITY, BOYS."

I suspect that they are some of the band of the Rio Grande Roughs."

The speaker was a youth of about eighteen, with a fine physique and a face that was a study, so much was there in it of deviltry, indomitable pluck and recklessness.

It was a clear-cut, handsome face, scorched brown by southern sun, but illumined by eyes that were large, lustrous and full of expression.

Looking alone at the eyes, one would say that the youth possessed a noble nature, but in the reckless expression of the mouth, with its cynical smile, young as he was, something that contradicted the look, almost pathetic, which haunted the upper part of his face.

His dress was an odd mixture, but picturesque, for he wore fringed buckskin leggings stuck in the tops of high-heeled boots, on which were ringing spurs; a red silk shirt, black scarf knotted sailor fashion under the broad collar, and a velvet Mexican jacket, profusely ornamented with buttons, while his hat was an embroidered sombrero.

His hair was dark, worn long, but scrupulously well cared for, and he was armed with an ugly-looking knife and pair of revolvers.

Apparently having just awakened from an afternoon siesta, he had risen from a handsome serape spread upon the ground beneath the shade of the live oak tree, when his eyes had fallen upon three horsemen halting a mile away, just where a trail across the prairie entered the hills.

Upon a lofty range himself, he looked down upon the three riders, and having decided by their suspicious actions that they were intending mischief, he gathered up his serape and was turning away, when his vision rested upon a horse and rider coming across the prairie at a canter, and following the trail which led to where the trio the youth was watching were now in ambush.

At sight of the lone rider coming across the prairie, the youth started, uttered a surprised exclamation, and bounded back over the ridge.

A short distance down the slope was a spring and a plot of meadow land, where the grass grew luxuriantly, and here a pony was staked out.

Of the hardy and fleet race of Texas ponies, this one possessed extraordinarily good points, for he was as clean-limbed as a thoroughbred racer, and had indications of being very fleet and enduring.

Lying near were a handsome silver-mounted saddle and bridle, much lighter than was the customary equipments of that kind, and a long lariat hung to the saddle horn.

Quickly the pony was bridled and saddled, the serape rolled up tightly and strapped to the cantle, and the youth was ready to mount.

But before doing so he took his lariat from the horn, saw that the coils were not entangled, and then looked carefully to his weapons.

Mounting, he showed that his carriage in the saddle was perfect—that he was at home there.

As he turned his pony down the slope in a direction that would bring him around the range toward where he had seen the three horsemen dismount and go into ambush, where the trail entered the hills, he muttered:

"Now, Lucifer, you have got to make two miles to another's one, for I am needed over yonder, and you must get me there."

Then, while a look of intense recklessness passed over his young face, he continued:

"If I count odds now, then I am not

the daring devil men call me; but I am Wild Kid, the Terror, and must keep up his reputation."

With this, having reached the valley, he put spurs to Lucifer and went flying along the trail at a tremendous speed.

CHAPTER II.

CAUGHT IN THE COILS.

There was no more beautiful girl in the ranchlands of Texas than was Marie Brasher, daughter of one of the richest cattlemen along the Rio Grande.

Where other ranchers had cattle and horses by the hundreds, Major Donald Brasher owned them by the thousands.

Where the homes of other ranchers were comfortable, the major's was luxurious, at least, for that far, wild land of the frontier.

Where the daughters of other ranchers were pretty, Marie Brasher was beautiful and accomplished, and easily won the title of "Belle Marie," and of "Lady Beauty, of Idlerest Ranch."

To one who saw "Belle Marie" as she was cantering along over the prairie, mounted upon a beautiful black mare, that arched her neck proudly, as though conscious that she bore the loveliest girl among the ranches, she would indeed have been considered beautiful both in face, form and carriage.

She wore a becoming riding-habit of blue, trimmed with silver lace and buttons, a light, embroidered sombrero with a long black plume, while her saddle and bridle were worth a small fortune.

A lariat hung at one saddle-horn, and in a holster upon the other side was a revolver.

Her face was cast in a perfect mold, her eyes being large and expressive. Her hair hung in two heavy braids down upon the saddle housing, and was tied with a blue ribbon.

On went her pretty mare in a swinging lope. The expression of the young equestrienne's face was earnest and anxious, as though she was bent upon some special mission.

"Father would be angry, I know, if he ascertained that I went to Wild Kid's cabin to see him; but would I be doing right to resist his urgent call to come to him, now that he is wounded and perhaps may die?"

"No; I'll take the consequences, for I have not forgotten that he risked his life to save mine the day the Indians shot my pony and raided the trails."

"I'll try and get back before nightfall, but if I do not I will frankly tell father where I have been."

She had now reached a part of the trail where it wound from the prairie into the hill country, and drew her horse down to a walk.

Ahead a few hundred yards was a cut through which the trail ran, the ridge on either side covered with small trees.

"I am not suspicious, but I do dread passing through Death Pass, especially alone, for so many times have men lost their lives there. I can see half a dozen graves yonder now," and she glanced to the left, where was a little vale.

In full view were a number of those little mounds, never to be mistaken, and about which a weird interest ever hovers, even to the most callous observer.

As she rode into the cut, the banks of which were now fifteen feet in height, there suddenly shot out into the air three small, dark clouds.

They were coils of lassoes, which, aimed true, and spreading out as they flew forward, settled down upon their victims, for the horse was caught in two, the maiden in the third noose.

With a snort of fright the animal had plunged forward, to be brought up with a grip that could not be shaken off, while the coil settling over the shoulders of Marie Brasher, had pinioned her arms close to her side.

A startled, indignant cry broke from the girl's lips, and her face paled as she glanced upon the banks to see who had thus captured her.

Three forms instantly sprang into view, and two of them, slipping down into the cut, seized her horse and quickly slipped the fair rider's revolver from its holster to thus disarm her.

"How dare you seize me?" cried the indignant girl, as she glanced from one to the other of her captors, seeming to realize as she did so that she was in merciless hands.

"Gold is the reason, for we were paid to catch you, Lady Beauty, and we've earned our pay," answered one of the men, whose face Marie could not see, for all three wore red handkerchiefs tied over their heads, with holes cut through for the eyes.

"You are some of the lawless gang about El Monte, I know, but who is the master you serve?"

"That our master, as you call the one who pays us, will or will not make known to you as he pleases; but now, you go with us, Lady Beauty, and it will be a long, hard trail I take."

The words were prophetic, for, as he ceased speaking, a bullet crashed through his brain and he started upon the long, hard trail of death!

CHAPTER III.

WILD KID CHIPS IN.

"Hold 'em under sight, pards! We've got 'em corralled! I'll drop down!"

These words followed the shot from the banks on the right, and down into the cut came a human form, catching upon his feet as nimbly as a cat, and with a revolver in each hand.

At the first shot and the fall of their leader, the two others, hearing the words which indicated that others were above, had dashed through the cut with the speed of deer, firing, but at random, as they ran.

The one who had dropped into the cut was the youth, who had been taking an afternoon siesta on the mountain, an hour before, and from his point of lookout had seen the three men go into ambush.

His handsome face was lighted up with an angry flash in his eyes, and his reckless mouth indicated that he was there to take all chances with the odds against him.

Released from the grasp of the men upon her bridle rein, the spirited and frightened horse of the young girl darted forward with a bound, but the severe Texas bit was drawn upon hard, and the animal, thus reined to a halt, wheeled about, and, on a run, passed the spot where the youth stood.

"I guess she's frightened of me, too, though she oughtn't to be," muttered Wild Kid, as he saw the horse bound away with its fair rider, and a bitter smile passed over his face.

But, with a smile, he turned to the fallen desperado, and, bending over him, snatched the handkerchief from his face that had served as a mask.

As he did so he saw that Marie Brasher was coming back, and turned to meet her, his face lighting up with pleasure as he courteously raised his sombrero.

"Bud Poisal, I believe you thought I had deserted you, but it was my mare's fault, for she nearly ran off with me, she was so frightened."

"And you were not frightened, Lady

Beauty, though they had you in a close place?"

"Indeed I was! But when I saw the man drop dead by my side, from your shot, and recognized you, I forgot my fear. See, I have their three lariats," and she pointed to the trio of ropes, one about herself, the other two around the mare's neck.

"Well, this fellow will not need a rope again, and the other two will get theirs yet—around their necks, for I think I know them, though I will wrong no man by accusing him until I am sure, Lady Beauty."

"I have seen that man before, Bud," said Marie, gazing down into the upturned face.

"He is coyote food now, Lady Beauty, but he was El Monte Ed, who was one of the worst toughs about El Monte, and that is saying a great deal."

"Yes, I have heard of him, and seen him, too. But, what do you think was their motive in seizing me, Bud?"

"To make your father pay big to get you back, maybe; or, perhaps, to kidnap you for one of your many lovers, Lady Beauty," and the last words were uttered half in earnest, half in a joking tone.

"These are not the days, Bud Poisal, when a man wins a lady's love by force, but rather by deeds of nobleness and daring. But now, let me thank you for your gallant rescue of me, Bud, and at the risk of your own life, for you took no count of the odds against you."

"Would I be half a man if I didn't do so, when you needed my aid, Miss Marie?" he said, with an earnestness that caused Marie to quickly remark:

"Do you know where I was going when they halted me?"

"For a run over the prairies?"

"I was going to see you."

"To see me?"

"Yes. Half Breed Joe came to the ranch early this morning and hung about until he saw me, when he told me that you had been dangerously wounded at El Monte, but had been taken to your cabin and begged that I would come to see you."

"I could not refuse, Bud, owing you my life, as I did; and knowing my father would be angry if he found out where I was going, I slipped away from home and was on my way to your cabin when those three men held me up, so now I know it was a plot to kidnap me."

"You bet it was, Lady Beauty! And don't you mind any more such calls, for I don't intend to hand in my chips for many a long day, for something in my heart and brain tells me I will not."

"I'll trail this plot to the end, and I only wish I had some good pard I could rely upon to help me, to be my friend, for, to all about here, I am only Wild Kid, the Terror, as you understand, and many think I ought to have cloven hoofs and horns, I'm so bad. But I don't care what they think," and he laughed recklessly.

"I know that you are not what you are painted, Bud Poisal, though I do not doubt that you are wild and something of a terror in your way."

"Why not trust Doctor Delmar as your friend, for he likes you and always speaks well of you?"

The face of the youth flushed, and he said earnestly:

"No, indeed, Lady Beauty. Not Duke Delmar! I hate him; he is no friend of mine. But you had better ride back home, as your father will be angry with you for going out alone, and as I have no idea where those two men are, I'll go with you a short distance."

"The major will send out, I guess, and bury what's left of El Monte here."

"Oh, yes; father will see to that," and

gathering up the lariats, searching the body, and telling Marie that he would meet her at the end of the cut, Wild Kid clambered up the steep bank, got his pony, waiting a short distance away, and, mounting, dashed on, to find that the young girl had come upon the horse of El Monte, the others having left him behind in their flight.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD MISSION.

Wild Kid accompanied Marie Brasher within sight of Idlerest Ranch, and then left her, declining her urgent invitation to go on with her and let her father and mother know that he had again served her so well.

"No, Lady Beauty; your father and mother don't like me, for they believe I am all bad, and I won't go where I'm not wanted."

"Why, the major wouldn't let me join his company of Texas Rangers, and when I warned them of danger one night he said I knew more of the Comanches than an honest man ought to, and only went to the camp and told them of the Comanches lying in ambush for them to keep from being run out of the country."

"Yes, Lady, he even offered to pay me for saving you that time from the Indians, and that made me mad clean through."

"I know that my father distrusts you, Wild Kid, as many others do; but I have faith in your good intentions, and hope some day you will show your enemies how wrong they were."

"Remember, I am your friend, and ever will be. Good-by."

She held out her hand, which the youth grasped, and as he rode on his way, murmured to himself:

"Now I've got more sense than to fall in love with a girl older than I am, and so far above me—she, beautiful, accomplished, and an heiress, and I a waif of the prairie, an outcast; but, something draws me to her in a way I cannot understand, and I just vow she shall not be sacrificed to any one of half a dozen fellows I know her father would marry her to."

"No, indeed! She can't marry a dead man, and it will come to that if one of those I have in mind is selected by the major, for she does not love any of 'em I have reason to think, from what I saw one night."

"Now I'll take the trail of those two men from where they ran off, and ascertain just where it leads, and so learn what this raid means."

With this he rode back to the scene of the tragedy, took up the trail of the two masked fugitives, and followed it at a canter over the prairie.

In half a dozen places efforts had been made by the two to cover up their tracks, but the young trailer lost no time in searching for the trace where he lost it, for he seemed to know just where to go to pick it up again, and did so, skipping at times the distance of a mile.

"I thought so," he had to say. "They wish to give the idea that they are going to the Indian country, but they are not, for, as they came this way, they are bound for old Carlos Trego's Hacienda; so I'll go right there, for it's getting too dark to see the trail now."

With this he urged his horse into a canter, and mile after mile kept the pace up across the great green plain.

He seemed to know the country perfectly, and to have directed his course unerringly, for, after an hour's ride, there loomed up before him a long, low structure, spreading over several acres of land.

There was one building rising higher than the rest, and this proved to be a chapel.

Once the place had been an old Spanish mission, strongly built of stone and adobe, where the padres of a century before had had their home.

But now the old mission was but a ruin, and only one wing of it was occupied by a Spaniard, his wife, and son, who owned a few cattle, tilled a score of acres of land, with the aid of several peon servants, and dwelt there seemingly satisfied with their humble lot.

Some said that old Carlos Trego was a Spanish noble, exiled for reasons which he kept to himself; but, whether true or not, he lived in the old mission, and was never seen in the settlements, his son, Juan, going after supplies when needed.

Travelers visiting at the mission were always most hospitably treated, and the rangers, on their marches, found a welcome whenever they camped there.

Wild Kid did not approach the mission from the two trails leading to it, but toward a light that shone in one wing.

He passed through the old burying-ground of the padres, and, as he rounded the wing, drew rein just beneath the window from which shone the light.

Rising to his feet in his saddle, he peered cautiously into the narrow, open window, and as he did so, he heard a voice say sternly:

"I tell you that your guest is Buffalo Bill, the great scout, Senor Trego, and he has come to this country on a secret mission, of which I have been informed by letter, and you must do as I say—never allow him to leave this old ruin alive! Yes, this night he must die!"

CHAPTER V.

FOREWARNED.

Standing upright in his saddle, Wild Kid was able to see all that was in the room into which he looked through the narrow window.

Above him loomed the dark walls of the mission, and around him were the gravestones marking the resting place of many who had passed away generations before.

The window looked out upon this gruesome abode of the dead, which was surrounded by a wall half crumbled down in places, and which Wild Kid's pony had leaped, as his rider was determined to see in that window, and had an idea he would be high enough by standing up in his saddle to do so.

Wild Kid thought he would like to see just who was at the mission before he asked for shelter, for if there were two strangers there he did not doubt but that they were the intended kidnappers of Marie Brasher.

As they were masked he could not see their faces, but he had noticed their general outline before he had fired upon their leader, and he had studied well the tracks of their horses, which he had also seen, before he sought his position of attack.

If those horses were in the corral, and two men answering the description of those he had seen at the kidnapping were there, then he would not seek shelter in the mission that night, but lie in wait for them the next morning and try and hold them up single handed and taking them back to the ranches, turn them over to the band of Texas Rangers, whose duty it was to protect the scattering settlement from raiders across the Rio Grande, the Comanches and bad characters in general.

But Wild Kid saw more than he had anticipated when he looked through that open window in the mission.

He had heard more than he had expected to, when he listened to the threat to kill Buffalo Bill, a man of whom he

had heard much, and who was his hero, but whom he had never seen.

There were four men in the room, which was large and furnished only with a table and chairs.

He recognized old Senor Trego, gray, grizzled and stern looking, and sitting next to him was the man who had uttered the dire threat against Buffalo Bill.

Wild Kid knew this man well, as a hanger-on about the settlement town, as El Monte was called.

He was called "Captain," as it was said, upon his own authority, that he had once been an army officer, and he had an erect, military bearing, but a face that was evil, sinister and cruel.

His intimates called him "Panama," and he was a desperate gambler and known to be a man-killer, for he had established such a reputation in El Monte and was greatly feared.

The other two men in the room were, Wild Kid was sure, the game he was in search of.

One was short, the other tall, and they were dressed as the two kidnappers had been.

They were unmasked, now, and the youth recognized them as two more of El Monte's tough citizens, known as Mustang Matt and Half Breed Jose.

Nominally, they were cowboys, but they spent most of their time in gambling and idleness.

The four men were within fifteen feet of the youth, some ten feet below him, and he could see them distinctly and hear all that they said.

Fortunately, a vine half obscured the window, giving shelter to his face as he peered through.

Like men who were cautious, from being in daily danger, the men talked in low tones, but each word Wild Kid heard.

It was Panama who had made the threat against Buffalo Bill, and in response Don Trego, as he was continually called, asked:

"Are you sure that he is alone, Senor Captain?"

"Yes, for he always travels that way, for I know him well."

"You have seen him before, then, senor?"

"Do you see this scar on my forehead?"

"Yes, Senor Captain."

"Well, he gave me that, and he thought he had killed me, but I have as many lives as a cat and hold on well."

"I tell you that he has come to Texas on a secret mission, and if we do not check his career right here, a number of us will stretch hemp, for I can pick out scores of men who are now dodging the gallows in El Monte alone."

"What crime sent you hiding here, Don Trego, is none of my business, but I live here because I would die East, and Mustang Matt and Half-Breed Jose are about in my category."

"But Buffalo Bill is Chief of Scouts up at the line of forts in the Northwest, and he has left them on a mission which means death to more than one man in El Monte."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PLOT TO KILL.

"Now, I got this letter by coach this morning, and it was just in time, for Buffalo Bill has traveled fast."

"The letter is from a life-long pard, a soldier who is well trusted and a square man, but he owed me his life on more than one occasion, and he did not care to see me hang, so when he overheard that the scout was coming to El Monte he decided to find out all he could and warn me."

"So he played eavesdropper, and heard enough to know that Buffalo Bill was on a special man-hunt."

"I was not mentioned, for I am supposed to be dead, but he warned me."

"He heard Buffalo Bill go over with the general his intended trail to Texas, and the latter told him to stop here at this old mission one or two nights, and he might glean some information about the El Monte settlement before going there."

"So I came at once to post you, and blow my soul if the man is not here ahead of me, for when I saw him I could hardly believe my eyes, and lucky I am that he did not see me."

"I never allow my guests to see each other until I know it is proper, Senor Captain," said the Don.

"You are wise, Don; but tell me of Buffalo Bill's coming."

"He came this afternoon, mounted upon a splendid animal, and with its match following with a pack saddle."

"He told me he was on his way to El Monte, but wanted to rest a day or two, and gave his name as Fred Williams, a government courier."

"Yes, his real name is William Frederick Cody, and he has twisted his Christian names to suit, for he dared not let it be known that he was Buffalo Bill; but I know him, and forewarned is being forearmed, as he shall know to his cost."

"I am to consider, Senor Captain, what you say about the general telling him to stop here, at my mission."

"It must be General Carr, who commanded this district some years ago, and knows of me and the mission, and so it would be bad for his courier to meet his death here."

"Bah! he has come here through an Indian country, and who could follow his trail after a couple of days?"

"Who would know that he ever reached here?"

"I tell you, Don, you are as deep in the mire as the rest of us, and when I got my soldier friend's letter I came at once to you."

"I was sure that with your aid, and your son Juan's, we could easily cut short the career of Buffalo Bill; but here I find Mustang Matt and Half Breed Jose, two more to aid us, for they are of our kind, and so I say down the scout this very night."

"He's got money, which goes to you, Don, his horses and traps Matt and Jose can have to sell, and I claim only his life."

"Now, Don Trego, do you intend to desert a pard in need?"

"I'm not that kind, Senor Captain, but this man, Fred Williams, as he called himself to me, came here to claim my hospitality."

"You say he is a man-hunter, and will kill you, and others, at El Monte."

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature, so as you know that he is going there, you will be prepared for him and can fight him, for all know what you are."

"And you show your ignorance by not knowing what and who Buffalo Bill is."

"Why, that man carries a charmed life, and no one dare face him, hoping to be on equal terms, for he is quicker than lightning, his aim is as true as death, and he is wholly devoid of fear."

"No; trap him, and we can kill him, but attempt to face him and we will die, and he will go on his way serenely."

"He is here in your home, and Matt and Jose here will help me, so you can stand aloof and let us do the work."

"Only tell us where you put him for the night, and we'll do the rest."

"Senor, I obey. He is at his supper, now, but he will sleep in the little meet-

ing room off the old chapel, for there is where I put strangers."

"The river runs under the window, just outside of the wall, and a body dropped into it would be quickly carried away."

"You know the old mission well, Senor Captain, so make yourself at home, and with Senors Matt and Jose, breakfast with us, for I suppose the stranger will not be here."

"No, he will not."

"Spread your serapes here, if you wish to sleep, and Juan will care for your horses."

"Good-night, senors," and Don Carlos Trego left the room, and Panama and his pards went on planning just how they would cut short the career of Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER VII.

BUFFALO BILL.

It was an hour before sunset when a horseman rode up to the gate of the ruined mission, where Don Trego made his home, amid the memories and the graves of by-gone generations.

He was splendidly mounted, thoroughly equipped, had a repeating rifle, revolvers and bowie, with a pack horse trotting obediently along behind him, and carrying a well-stocked pack saddle, apparently for a long journey.

The horseman was one who could not go unnoticed anywhere, for he was tall and possessed an athletic and graceful form, while his dress partook of the frontiersman, with the top boots, buckskin leggings, hunting shirt and broad-brimmed sombrero.

The face of the horseman was one to command instant respect and admiration, for, added to its being a handsome one in a marked degree, it was stamped with indomitable pluck, character and will, while his manner of addressing Carlos Trego, who met him at the massive doors leading into the plaza of the mission, was gentle and courteous.

"Senor, do you speak English, for I have little faith in my Spanish?" he said, with a smile, recognizing at a glance that if the Don was an American he was of Spanish or Mexican birth.

"I speak English, and would know how I could serve the senor?"

"Is this the old Mission del Monte?"

"It is, senor, what is left of it."

"I was told by army officers who knew of its hospitality, if I came here and found Don Carlos Trego still the rancho, I would receive good treatment at his hands, and I desire to rest for a day or two, after a long journey, and before continuing on to El Monte, the settlement some forty miles south of here, I believe."

"Your friends told you the truth, senor, for I have a good garden, fruit trees, domestic fowl, with a well-supplied larder, and game for the shooting, fish for the catching."

"You are welcome; but may I ask the senor's name?"

"Frederick Williams, and army courier is my present occupation."

"I thank you, senor, and will look myself to my horses."

The stranger was shown where he could place his saddle and pack, in his room, one connected with the old chapel, and then led his horses to a bit of meadow land on the stream, where he staked them out.

He found his room more like a prison than a chamber, but there was a cot, table and chair there, and he had no reason to complain.

A youth of twenty, with a dark, handsome face, was called by the Don and told to go off and catch some fish and kill a deer for supper, and then the Don showed

the stranger through the old ruin, he seeming much interested in it.

After looking it over the stranger decided that but six persons dwelt in a structure that at one time must have accommodated half a thousand, and these half dozen were the Don, Juan, his son; and his wife, a woman of forty, with a face that held the traces of former beauty and refinement, and with eyes in which lurked a world of meaning.

She seemed impressed with the handsome stranger, and at once set the peon servants, a man and a woman, to work preparing supper, the sixth dweller there, also a peon, guarding at the time a small herd of cattle and ponies down in the meadow lands.

With a glance at the garden, the domestic fowls, and having heard the orders given Juan, the stranger thought his chances for a tempting supper were excellent, and went to his little room to look over his traps, as Don Carlos received a signal that other visitors were coming.

They were two horsemen, and the stranger, observing them at a distance, saw them engage in excited conversation with the Don, who led them away out of sight.

Soon after another arrival came, and he also was seen to hold an earnest conversation with the Don, and was led away toward the living rooms of the family.

But when night fell and the stranger was called by Juan to supper, he was surprised to see none of the other arrivals there.

He saw the senora, who appeared to have dressed up for his especial benefit, and Juan was there, with two of the peon servants ready to wait upon them.

But the Don and the three men whom he had seen arrive were not there.

The absence of the former was explained by the senora's saying that the Don was away with the cattle, but nothing was said of the others.

"This is a mysterious household, and I must keep my eyes open," muttered the stranger.

But the food set before him was of the best, from the coffee and hot biscuit to the broiled venison, bacon and eggs, and he ate heartily, enjoying everything, and asking many questions about the surrounding country and its people, little dreaming that in an old isolated wing of the ruin four men were then plotting to kill him, for the strange horseman, giving him the name as Fred Williams, was none other than W. F. Cody, Buffalo Bill, sent on a secret mission of desperate danger down into the danger land bordering the Rio Grande in the Lone Star State.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE USE OF A LASSO.

Wild Kid had heard enough.

He cautiously lowered himself from his standing position in the saddle, dismounted, and led his horse silently away through the old burying-ground to the shelter of some mesquite trees a few hundred yards distant, growing near the bank of the river.

There was good grazing there, and in a sheltered spot the pony was staked out.

Then, with his lariat in hand, for Wild Kid was an expert in its use, and would have as soon left his belt of arms behind as it, he made his way back under the walls of the old mission.

"I must save that splendid man I have heard so much about.

"If I can't, why, then I know who will be the ones to hang."

With this brave determination in his mind, he skirted around the walls, looking for some place where he could enter.

He well knew the danger he ran, for Don Trego had a pack of the largest and most ferocious dogs in the country, five of them, and they were turned loose in the grounds about the mission at night when the family retired.

With several strangers there that night, Wild Kid hoped they would be kept in their pen until late, but at any rate he would take all chances.

The outer walls here and there had crumbled half down, but the inner inclosure about the mission proper, the plaza, garden and canal, had been well kept up.

Getting within the outer wall, Wild Kid searched in vain for a break.

The wall had been built for safety, and was all of fifteen feet in height, while no tree had been allowed to grow alongside of it.

But Wild Kid suddenly paused and glanced upward.

He was not looking at the stars, however.

Standing under the shadow of the rear of the chapel, his eyes had fallen upon the stone cross upon the apex of the roof.

It was nearly forty feet above him, but his ingenious mind had hit upon a way to get into the mission yard.

He would depend upon his lariat.

In a word, he would lasso the cross.

Stepping backward, he measured the distance critically, then swung his lariat around and around his head and launched it upward.

It did not go up to the cross.

Throwing a lasso upward was harder than in a straight line on a level, he found. Again he made the throw.

The coil fell with a heavy thud, which he feared would be heard within the living wing of the mission, a hundred yards away.

Again he threw and failed.

But he was not discouraged, a thought came to him, and he darted away.

At the river bank he halted, and he dropped the long lariat into the water to make it heavier.

Then he returned and made another throw.

He nearly reached the cross this time.

A second time he threw, but it did not quite reach.

With all his might he threw it a third time, but it hit the base of the cross.

He needed about five feet more to encircle the top with the noose.

Again he darted away.

But within ten minutes he was back again, leading his pony.

Placing him in position, he went slowly to work to see if the extra height of some six feet would not help him reach the goal.

But could he throw upward from his saddle as from the ground?

That was the question that bothered him.

But soon he was ready, and with a strong effort the coil went sailing upward.

It struck the cross fairly, but two feet below the top.

Again he tried, and this time it went over one arm of the cross and hung there.

But, drawing upon it, Wild Kid found that the noose had not caught.

Nerving himself for another effort, he once more launched the lariat toward the cross.

The stars shone brightly, and he could see fairly well.

Eagerly he watched the dark coil in its flight, saw it soar above the cross, hover there an instant, and settle down.

He gave the lariat a slight pull.

It held.

Then he pulled hard, and it remained fast.

He had been successful at last.

CHAPTER IX.

IN LIGHT AND SHADOW.

Wild Kid could hardly restrain a shout of triumph as he felt that he had been successful in his effort to lasso the cross.

But he wisely forbore from doing so, and rode his pony back to his grazing-ground.

He was soon back again under the shadow of the chapel, and, grasping the lariat firmly, swung his weight upon it.

It held firm.

Then he took off his boots and tied them about his waist.

His next move was to seize the lasso firmly and begin to walk up the chapel wall.

The idea struck him that he might pull the stone cross over on top of him, but he grimly muttered:

"I guess it would bury me and give me a tombstone all in one. But I'll take the chances."

Soon he reached the cross, and caught his feet upon the apex of the roof.

There he stood a while to rest, one arm clinging around the cross.

With his hard efforts in throwing the lariat and his climb, he was tired, tough as a pine knot though he was.

But he soon was rested, and drawing up the lasso, began to let himself down the steep roof.

Reaching the edge, he saw a light streaming out of an open door beneath him.

It must be from the chapel room which had been given to Buffalo Bill, he thought.

But he must make no mistake.

It would not do to find that it was a room occupied by Panama or the two men he had tracked there.

The dogs might have been turned loose, but he must risk that.

So he climbed up the roof again and went down the other side.

All was dark there.

But the lasso was long enough to reach the ground, and so he lowered himself.

Arranging the end, in case he came back to it in a run, he slipped cautiously along the wall of the chapel, came around in front, halted under the shadow of the tower for a moment, and looked about to get his bearings.

He soon discovered that he was in one end of the large plaza, the chapel standing aloof from the mission house proper.

To his right, a hundred yards, was the main entrance, in front of him, across the plaza, was the night corral for the horses and cattle, and to the left he saw a light shining from an open door.

These he knew were the living quarters of Don Trego and his people, for Wild Kid had been to the mission half a dozen times before, several times passing a night there.

"The wing where those precious toughs are is right yonder, and they have put out their light; but they command a view of the room over here by the chapel, so I must go slow, as they may be on the watch."

So saying, he kept along under the shadow of the chapel until he drew near the stream of light that came out of the open door at one end.

There was a window also, a narrow one, out of which the light shone, and a form passed between the light and the door.

Was it the scout?

Again the form darkened the light in the doorway and remained there.

Then the youth glanced down upon the pavement, and he beheld the shadow outline of the one who obscured the light.

It was plainly photographed in black upon the pavement—a slender, upright form, with long hair falling below his

shoulders and a broad sombrero upon his head.

It could but be the scout, and the boy, crouching in the shadow of the chapel, whispered distinctly:

"Buffalo Bill, don't move, but listen to me."

There was a slight start of the shadow, the outline of a hand and arm bending toward a revolver in the belt was seen, and then came the low uttered words:

"Who are you?"

"Are you Buffalo Bill?"

"You appear to know that fact, and I am not one to deny my identity."

"Other eyes than mine are upon you, and your life is in danger."

"Pretend to prepare for bed, and put out your light, for I dare not be seen."

"When it is dark in your room I will come there."

"I will do as you tell me, for, in light or darkness I am able to defend myself," was the cool reply of the scout.

CHAPTER X.

WILD KID MEETS BUFFALO BILL.

There was a movement of the shadowy form, the broad sombrero was taken off, the belt of arms unbuckled, a movement as though the high top boots were being removed, and then the light went out.

As it did so Wild Kid glided from the shadow of the chapel to the door of the little room.

Entering, he heard the low-spoken words:

"Now, pard, friend or foe, I am ready for you, for I have you covered."

The scout was not to be caught napping.

The thought pleased the Kid, and he laughed lightly and whispered:

"Good! You are wide awake, I see."

"I always am, when not asleep."

"Now, who are you?"

"Only a boy."

"Who else?"

"Your friend."

"So I would judge from your coming here as you do; but appearances are deceitful."

"That's so; but you are Buffalo Bill?"

"Are you guessing?"

"No."

"Why do you ask?"

"I did not wish to help the wrong man."

"So you are here to help me, are you?"

"Yes, to save your life, for there is a plot to kill you to-night."

"Ah! Now you are talking business."

"I'm a business boy, for I'm dodging death about half the time myself."

"I cannot see you, but I rather like you, pard."

"I hope you will when you know me better; but I reckon I had better not preach too long, but get down to business."

"Fire away."

"You came here from the upper country, where you are chief of scouts at the frontier forts, and you are in Texas on a special mission, but did not give yourself away, but told Don Trego that you were a government courier, and your name was Fred Williams."

"Ah! you are Juan, the Don's son."

"If I was I'd expect to be hanged, and for a good reason; but though I may die with my boots on, I won't hang."

"Who are you?"

"A boy, an outcast, prairie waif, good-for-nothing, terror, or what you will, christened by the toughs of El Monte Wild Kid, but at camp meeting called by the parson Bud Poisal, which name I answer to quick if anybody would say Bud Poisal would lie or steal a horse."

"Now, you've got my family history, I being the entire family outfit, and though

it's too dark to see me, I'm here, and to help you."

Buffalo Bill was decidedly impressed by this short and to the point explanation of the youth, and he felt at once drawn toward him, though he could not see a feature of his face.

"My brave young friend, I appreciate what you have told me, and also that you are here to aid me to escape some threatened danger."

"What is that danger, may I ask?"

"I'll tell you by a short trail."

"Three men tried to kidnap, this afternoon, the noblest girl in the State of Texas, the only one who thinks I'm not as black as they paint me; but I saw their little game, chipped in, and sent one of them, the leader, El Monte Ed, to round-up cattle in the happy hunting grounds, and the other two got away."

"Good for you!"

"I rode nearly home with Lady Beauty—the boys call her so, but her real name is Miss Marie Brasher—and then went back to trail the two men who were with El Monte Ed."

"I tracked them here, and I came up to the mission on the river side, where there is an old graveyard."

"I saw a light, and standing up in my saddle, I took a peep into the room, in an old wing of the old ruin."

"There I saw Don Trego, the two birds I was after, and a man who had just arrived, and who they call captain, as he was once an army officer, he says, but I doubt it, though he may have been a bad soldier."

"His pards call him Panama, and I heard him tell the Don, and the others, for they all belong to the same gang, that he had a letter to-day from a friend at a northwestern fort, telling him to beware, as you were on your way to El Monte to look up certain men."

"Indeed, he is well posted."

"He seemed to be; but you know best."

"Then Panama pointed to a scar on his head and said you gave that to him, and he was supposed to be dead; but if you saw him you would know him, and there were other men about El Monte you wanted."

"He knows it all."

"Then it's time for him to die, as he can learn no more," was the laconic response, and Buffalo Bill laughed, while Wild Kid resumed his story.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COUNTERPLOT.

"Now, what must I call you, for I want a handle for my tongue to get a grip on?" asked Wild Kid in his frank way.

"Call me Buffalo Bill."

"I don't want to, for you're a man, and a great one, and I'm only a kid, for I can't vote for several years yet."

"My name is Cody, then."

"Then Mr. Cody goes, or is it captain, major, or colonel, for titles are worth dollars in Texas."

"I am plain W. F. Cody, chief of scouts, nicknamed Buffalo Bill."

"Then Chief Cody goes with me, for as there are no misters around this country I'm not used to the name."

"But let me push on along my tracking trail, for I wish to tell you that Panama said the only way for him to escape, and the others too, whom you wanted, was to call in your chips."

"I see."

"He wanted the Don and his son Juan to go in with him, but Don Trego backed out for the boy and himself, yet did not say they should not do the work, for he's

a bad one, I've had my eye on for some time, only it's catching before hanging, you know."

"Yes, like making a rabbit stew—you first catch your rabbit."

"Sure. But the other three—Panama, Mustang Mott, and Half Breed Jose, all hard ones from El Monte, plotted to come over here when you were asleep and open fire on you, as they said you would naturally keep the door open, and thus they would down you."

"At the wall a couple of hundred feet from here, is a stone room, the Don said, with a window overlooking the river, and they could drop your body out there and the stream would carry it far away."

"You heard all this?"

"Oh, yes. I got it all down fine, and then I plotted to help you out."

"How did you get in?"

"Well, I'll tell you. I got in by a way which will enable you to say that you were saved by the cross."

"I don't understand. Are you a traveling missionary?"

"Not to any alarming extent; but as I could not get over the walls I lassoed the cross on the chapel, shinned up the side and down the roof, and I'm here, aren't I?"

"You certainly are in evidence, though I do not see you distinctly."

"And now you are here to help me fight out this battle or aid me to escape—which?"

"See here, chief, I could help you to escape, but I've got an idea you could do more good fighting it out; in fact, I've an idea."

"Let me have it, then."

"If Panama is really posted, you've got work ahead of you in these parts."

"True."

"Now, I'm not curious; but if you are playing a lone hand, but would like to have some one be pards with you, I'm with you for keeps."

"You are just the one I need, from what I've seen of you."

"You haven't seen me yet, only heard me, and maybe when you do get a sight of my picture by daylight you won't like it."

"I'll take chances on that."

"Then I'll do the same."

"Now, my idea is to go around the chapel, get my lariat, and hang the end over this side, so that I can be here with you in the fight, and then skip at a quick-step outside of the mission walls, I mean after the three men have passed in their chips."

"I'll be on hand should Don Trego and Juan, with the peons, take a hand against you; but my idea is that they will not; but, as I said, they'll hear something drop from the chapel roof if they do."

"Well, so far, good; but I think you'd better play that the three men must have followed you here to kill you, that they came from the northwest, not from El Monte, and make believe you think Don Trego is all right."

"He'll catch at that bait the same as a catfish will at a nigger's toe, and he'll pretend not to know the men at first; but then come out and say they are from El Monte, and asked for shelter for the night, which he gave them, little dreaming that they were here to murder you."

"I know the Don well, and he'll be glad to get out of it, while if you recognize the man Panama, you can give a reason for his attack on you, stating that in some way he knew of your coming."

"When I see all is serene I'll skip, and nobody will know me in the affair, only I'll have to borrow your lariat so as to tie it to mine, so I can draw them over after I am outside, as it would not do to leave mine fast to the cross."

"That's my game, chief."

"And it's a good one, and we'll play it to the end, be the stakes what they may," was Buffalo Bill's stern response.

CHAPTER XII.

WAITING.

Buffalo Bill felt that he had one to aid him, who, if a boy in years, was a man in pluck and experience.

It was a novel situation for him, he who had done so much to aid others, to save other lives, standing there in the dark in that old ruin, following the advice of a boy to save himself from death.

Yet there was a ring in the youth's tone that was sincere and true, and he trusted him implicitly, so said:

"Well, Wild Kid, when do you think our friends will come to the ball?"

"Not until they are sure that you are sound asleep, so I'll go after my lariat, for that will take me a little time; but if they should come while I'm gone, I'll get a shot or two in from somewhere to help you, and be about until I know all is quiet, only don't sleep too sound there."

"I never do, for my ears are on the watch when my eyes are closed."

"Good for the ears; but when you leave in the morning, take the river trail to El Monte, and I'll be somewhere along the way."

"Now I'll take a break."

With this the boy glided out of the room, passed close along under the shadow of the chapel wall, and soon reached his lariat where it hung on the other side.

He climbed up to the roof, passed along the ridge to the cross, and tied Cody's lariat to his own, passing them simply over the stone arm, and carrying the two ends down upon the other side.

This time he landed in a dark corner of the chapel and the wall, and not fifty feet from the room where Buffalo Bill was waiting.

He arranged the ends of the lariat so that he could get hold of them in a hurry, and could, by pulling upon one end, when outside of the wall, drag the other over the cross after him.

This done he moved gently forward to the door and whispered:

"All serene!"

"So far."

"Have you arranged your means of escape?"

"Oh, yes, and I've only got to crawl upon the wall, sit there in the shadow of the rear buttress of the chapel, and wait to see how the cards are played by the Don."

"If the game goes square I'll drop over on the other side, pull the lariats off the cross, and glide out through the graveyard to where my pony is feeding."

"You are not afraid of ghosts, then?"

"I've been a long time hoping to see one, but it seems that only those that are afraid of ghosts see them, for I can't, and I've been 'round dead folks right much in my time, so I guess when the spirit leaves the body it don't go fooling around any more where it left it; that's my opinion, but then I'm only a kid, and so green the cattle chase me."

"All cats are gray at night, so I can't see the green line you speak of," replied Buffalo Bill, much amused at the way Wild Kid had of expressing himself.

"It's just twelve o'clock," said Wild Kid, after a moment, glancing out of the door.

"How do you tell?"

"I study the stars every night, for I'm out as much in the darkness as daytime, and I get to knowing pretty well."

"Yes, you are a close observer, I see, and I'm lucky to have found such an ally, for I needed one, and hoped to find two

gentlemen I have letters to, to be the ones to aid me."

"Who are they?" came the blunt question.

"Do you know Major Donald Brasher?"

"You bet I know him; it was his daughter I saved from the kidnappers today, and a year ago I saved her from the Indians; but the major hates me, though I'm not growing thin over it."

"He's a good man, or would be, if a certain fellow who is trying to marry his daughter would let him."

Buffalo Bill listened to what Wild Kid said with great attention, but making no comment, asked:

"Do you know Doctor Duke Delmar?"

"I guess so, and he knows me, but our friendship don't pan out to any alarming extent, though I did keep Rip Falt from putting a bullet in his brain once."

"How did you prevent it?"

"Killed Rip, of course."

"That was the only way to stop Rip, and he was on the war-path for scalps, was blind for gore, and I pulled my gun on him when I saw that he had Doctor Duke booked to kill."

"And yet Doctor Duke Delmar is not your friend?"

"No; nobody is, except Lady Beauty Brasher, and she dare not show she don't think I'm the devil on a round-up."

"Well, I'll be your friend, and I'll show it."

"Don't, it will ruin your reputation even with El Monte toughs; besides, if you want me to help you down here, I can do more for you by not appearing to know you; but I think death has started on the trail, for I saw something moving over yonder, sure, though it might have been one of the Don's savage dogs."

"He would hardly let them out of the pen with strangers here."

"You are right, I never thought of that; but I see now that what I saw move was not dogs."

"No, I see them—they are men, three of them, and they are coming this way."

"They better stop to pray a little," was the quiet comment of Wild Kid as he held his revolver ready for use, Buffalo Bill standing by his side, a weapon also in his hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

PLAYING A DEADLY GAME.

If Buffalo Bill had had any doubt of his young ally, he could do so no longer when he saw three dark forms creep out of the shadows of the old mission and come silently toward the little adobe structure adjoining the chapel, where he had been placed to sleep.

The youth was as cool, the scout noticed, as though he were simply awaiting for a deer to come within range of his weapon.

Within the room it was intensely dark, but Buffalo Bill had placed the little lamp and matches where he could get at them readily when needed.

Bound upon a most important mission, after hearing the boy's story of the three men, and knowing that the Don, his son and two peons, if not in league with them, might be prevailed to join them when he showed resistance, Buffalo Bill's plan would have been to simply escape with Wild Kid, as he had entered, and come back with a force of ranchmen to gain his own and secure revenge.

But Wild Kid had urged otherwise, and in a way that convinced the scout that his plan was best.

If he could down his three foes, and convince Don Trego that he thought him wholly innocent and that the men had tracked him there to kill him, it would be best, for then he would have material to

work on in the future against a man whom he knew had been trusted by General Carr and other army officers.

Explaining to the Don that he had not slept, and saw the three men advancing toward him, he had protected himself, thus not letting it be known that he had been warned, or that Wild Kid was interested in the affair, the scout felt that he would hold a secret that would be to his advantage for future action.

"I'll halt them first, young pard, for I don't wish to fire on a man without a warning, if he is coming to assassinate me."

"All right, sir; that's my style, never to pull trigger unless the other party knows I am in the game."

"But don't hold 'em up until they get so close that none of the three can get away."

"Oh, yes, I mean to kill if I have to, but I'd like to catch the man Panama alive to find out just who he is."

"Can you pick him out?"

"He's the tallest of the three."

"Do you intend to fire also?"

"Well, it's your picnic, but if I'm needed I'll chip in and it won't cause me to lie awake nights if I happen to kill Half Breed Jose, for he has tried the coward act on me several times."

"He's the little fellow on the left."

The three men were now within thirty feet of the building, and advanced side by side on tiptoe.

In the center was the taller of the trio, the youth had said was Panama.

It was bright starlight, and they were distinctly visible now, for they were in the open, well out of the shadows of the mission walls, and nearing those about the chapel and its annex.

There was no doubt but that the men were coming directly toward the open door, for as Wild Kid whispered:

"There was no other place for them to go in that direction, except to the chapel to pray, and I guess prayer time hasn't come yet."

Another moment and the three men halted near the door and listened.

Buffalo Bill breathed heavily, like a man in deep slumber.

The men seemed reassured as they heard the breathing, some low order was given, and they separated, those on each side stepping some fifteen feet apart from the center one.

Instantly Wild Kid seized Buffalo Bill and drew him to one side of the door.

The cot was just in front of the open door, but the men had separated so that they could fire from three directions into the room, and thus make sure of wounding, if not killing the scout, before they rushed in on him.

Wild Kid seemed to anticipate their act, and so drew the scout to the shelter of the wall between the door and the window.

He had hardly done so when three shots came together, almost as one, and the bullets sank into the cot.

Then came a second discharge, and the three men ran toward the door, firing as they did so.

But two answering shots flashed from the darkness of the room, and Half Breed Jose and Mustang Matt dropped dead, while the form of the scout leaped from the door and his iron grip was upon the throat of Panama, who was hurled to the ground with stunning force, while he heard the stern command:

"Resist, and I will kill you!"

"I give up," cried the half-dazed man, and he was dragged by the scout into the room, his weapons torn from him, and hurled upon the floor, the door was closed, and Buffalo Bill stood at bay by the window,

his foot upon the prostrate prisoner's breast, while he waited for the coming of the Don, for voices were heard over by the mission, and forms were coming quickly to the scene.

As for Wild Kid, he had glided away like a ghost when he saw his chance to do so.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUFFALO BILL AT BAY.

Buffalo Bill was glad to see that his young pard had skipped out so quickly, he feeling sure that Panama had not seen him.

As he stood by the narrow window, a revolver in each hand, and his foot upon his prostrate prisoner, whom he had told that a move would be the signal for his death, he saw four forms coming toward the chapel.

Of course, they were the Don, his son Juan, and two of the peon cowboys.

Determined not to let the Don make the mistake of firing, if he could head him off, the scout called out:

"Ho, Don Trego, I have been attacked by men who must have trailed me here."

"Two of them are dead and I have the third a prisoner."

The words were uttered slowly and distinctly, and were heard and understood, for the Don called back:

"Oh, senior! It is terrible, and in my home, too."

"I will hang the one you have made a prisoner."

The Don then came running on to the scene, while Buffalo Bill called out:

"Hold, senior! I have been attacked, as I said, and I wish to be sure that those with you are not also my foes."

"Ah, senior, never! They are my son, Juan, and my peon cowboys, Pedro and Antonio."

"We are your friends and will defend you, for it makes me sad that they should have attacked you, my friend."

The Don and the others were now outside of the door, which Buffalo Bill had not yet opened, for he asked:

"Who are these men?"

"Three men from El Monte, senior, who came late to-night and asked for shelter, even saying that they were friends of yours, but would not disturb you."

"They must have trailed you here, senior; but the Vigilantes of El Monte will deal with the prisoner quickly, and I will guard him myself until daylight and go with you to El Monte on the morrow and see him hanged."

"Thanks, Don Trego, but I never allow another to do that which it is my duty to attend to, so I will guard the prisoner myself," and the scout opened the door and then continued:

"The lamp and matches are on that table, Don, so please let us have some light."

The Don's hand trembled as he lighted the lamp, and Buffalo Bill, who was watching him closely, saw that he was very pale.

The failure of the attack, and fear of being suspected of complicity in it had quite unnerved the Don.

But appearing not to notice his fright, Buffalo Bill said:

"Of course, Don, you are not responsible for your guests; but it came very near being a close call for me."

"As I had not been asleep, I saw them coming, felt their movements were suspicious, and prepared for them."

"When they fired into the room and then rushed forward, I met them with my revolver, and as the other two were quickly out of the game, I made this man a prisoner."

"Hand me my lariat off of my saddle, please, Don, and after I have secured him I'll have a look at his face, for perhaps that may tell me why I have been dogged here—ah!" and Buffalo Bill sprang forward and seized the prisoner by the throat with one hand, while he wrenched from him a letter he had seen him trying to tear up.

The act of the scout showed the Don and the others that Buffalo Bill was a man of giant strength and tiger-like quickness, for Panama, they knew, justly boasted of his wonderful prowess.

But in the hands of the scout he was but as a child.

Thrusting the letter into his pocket, Buffalo Bill proceeded to search the prisoner, all the time looking fixedly into his face, until at last he said, in a puzzled kind of way:

"I don't believe in the grave giving up its dead until they are called officially at the bugle call of Gabriel; but if you have not been numbered with the shadows, I am greatly mistaken, for I will take oath that you are North Adams, deserter from the army, and murderer of Sergeant Fair four years ago."

"I thought I had killed you, but it seems I was mistaken—yes, you are North Adams, and you escaped my bullet to die on the gallows."

CHAPTER XV.

ON GUARD.

The scout could not but note the startled look of the prisoner at his recognition of him, as also his appealing glance to Don Trego and Juan.

He also caught the nod of response the Don quickly gave, but pretending not to notice it, said:

"You need not appeal to the Don and his son for help, for they are honest men, and are on my side; but even if they were not I would fight them to keep you, and they would have to answer to the soldiers who are following on my trail if I disappeared."

The shot told, for the Don hastened to say:

"Yes, senior, we are honest men, and though we know this man, we never suspected him of being the wretch he is."

"He came to our house last night with his pards, as I have told you, but he came to kill you, and thus get me into trouble."

"But I will put him in irons at once and guard him until morning for you."

"No, Don, I will ask you to guard those two dead men instead, and this man I will keep here, for he cannot escape when I have secured him—my lasso not on my saddle horn, you say? Well, there is one on my pack saddle, so hand me that, please."

It was given to him, for Buffalo Bill had forgotten that Wild Kid had his lariat when he asked the Don to hand it to him.

Those who watched the scout tie the prisoner felt that he had had experience in that kind of work, and that Panama's chances of getting free were very slim.

But the Don, though appearing to side with the scout, and against Panama, was only too anxious to aid the latter to escape.

He knew that he dare not refuse to aid him, as Panama would avenge himself by betraying him; and, little dreaming now that the scout was playing a waiting game in pretending to trust him, Don Trego said:

"Now, senior, I insist that you shall not watch the prisoner, for you have already suffered enough under my roof."

"Leave him to me and I will guard him, while you seek the rest you need."

"Senior, I'm as wide awake as an owl at midnight, and I will keep the prisoner here."

"He is securely bound, as you see. I will draw my cot across the door, and sleep serenely until I am called to eat the tempting breakfast I know your good wife will have for me."

"But, senior—"

"I am determined, Don, so that ends it."

"I hope the senior does not fear to trust me with the prisoner," said the Don, reproachfully.

"Why should I? Are you not an honest man?"

The sudden questions staggered the Don, and he gave the prisoner a quick glance, and Buffalo Bill saw it, as well as a sign in return.

That the Don understood the sign was evident, for he argued no more, and bidding Buffalo Bill good-night, was going to the door, when the prisoner asked:

"May I have my blankets to rest on?"

"Oh, yes; for I would not have you uncomfortable," responded Buffalo Bill.

The Don himself brought them, and insisted upon spreading them, while Buffalo Bill, though pretending not to heed, heard the words slowly spoken by the prisoner:

"Juan and the peons on the trail tomorrow."

The Don nodded, and left with his son and the peons, removing the bodies of the two dead men as they did so.

Instantly Buffalo Bill blew the lamp out.

He would take no chances of a shot in the dark, and closing the stout door, he bolted it.

Then he drew his cot under the window, where he could raise his head and look out.

"Now, North Adams, I'll take a nap, and I advise you to forget yourself in slumber, also."

"I am not North Adams."

"Why lie, for your letter will prove that, as, though addressed to Captain Palos Panama, I noticed that it began, 'My dear North.'"

"Then, too, Adams, I recognize you, and remember that you bear a scar on your head I gave you, and thought the wound was fatal, as it knocked you off of the cliff into the river; but you escaped in some way, and so we meet again."

"Now, go to sleep, for you cannot escape, and you know me well enough to understand that the Don and his outfit could not take you from me if they even felt inclined to do so."

Whether convinced or not, Panama said no more, and the scout was soon asleep, though he was on the alert even in slumber.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TWO TRAILS.

When Buffalo Bill awoke the sun was up.

There lay his prisoner, secure, as he had left him.

Going to his pack saddle, the scout took out a pair of steel manacles, and these he put upon the prisoner with the remark:

"The lariat binds you, I see, but these will be comfortable."

"Understand, Adams, that I shall allow no nonsense, so obey me."

"I will, Buffalo Bill."

The scout smiled, and asked quickly:

"You have betrayed yourself, for why did you call me Buffalo Bill?"

"My name is Fred Williams, you know."

The prisoner bit his lip viciously, for he felt that he had made a mistake.

The Don now appeared and told the scout the senora had breakfast ready, and he would guard the prisoner while he ate.

"No, Don, I'll take him with me," was the reply, and this was done.

The senora was all smiles, and congratulations when Buffalo Bill appeared, and, turning to the prisoner, said reproachfully:

"And to think he has been our guest, and would treat you thus.

"For shame, Panama.

"I fear the Vigilantes will hang you when you reach El Monte."

But her kind heart enabled her to heap the plate of the prisoner with a good breakfast, and the Don's offer for his wife to guard the prisoner while he and the scout went out to get the horses ready being declined, Panama was taken along also to the corral.

"My son is looking up a stray horse of his, and the peons are guarding the cattle," explained the Don, without being asked, and Buffalo Bill made a mental note of the fact, as also that the three were missing.

The scout's two horses were saddled, that of the prisoner also, and the Don refused decidedly any pay for the night's lodging he had given, but seemed most particular in his directions to Buffalo Bill as to the trail he should take.

Telling the Don that he would pay the peons for burying the two dead men, upon his return, he bade a courteous farewell to the senora, shook hands with his host, and rode away with his prisoner upon the trail the Spaniard had directed him to take.

But Buffalo Bill was not to be caught napping, and he recalled that Wild Kid had told him to be sure and take the river trail.

That certainly was not the one he was then on, he felt sure, so he asked the prisoner if the other trail was not the shortest.

"No, the longest," said Panama, shortly.

"This is the direct one, then?"

"Yes."

"The other lies yonder, does it not?"

"No, in this other direction."

That agreed with the advice given by Wild Kid. So he said, while he watched the prisoner closely:

"We will take the other trail, then."

Buffalo Bill had observed looks pass between the Don, the senora and the prisoner, which he felt were intended to convey to the prisoner certain information.

He now saw that his avowed intention of taking the other trail caused the prisoner to start and grow anxious.

"You will have a hard ride of it, if you take the river trail, and are just as likely as not to run upon a band of redskins that way," urged Panama.

"I've met redskins before, and am pretty well armed and mounted, so I can run if I cannot fight, and your horse is a good one, too; but should I have to leave you behind it will save you from being hanged, as you certainly will be, North Adams."

The prisoner was white faced now, and brought forward several strong arguments of why the scout should not take what was known as the river trail, as it followed along the stream for several miles, and crossing it, recrossed after some distance, rendering it considerably longer than the one that ran directly across country from the old mission.

But Buffalo Bill was determined to go his own way, and turned out of the trail to cross country a mile or two to the other one.

The moment he did so the looks of the prisoner showed that the scout had saved

himself from an ambush and kept Panama from being aided in an escape.

A muttered imprecation in Spanish from the prisoner told how deep was his disappointment at the action of the scout in regard to the two trails.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SIGNAL AHEAD.

Buffalo Bill soon came into the other trail, and turned in the direction he had been going on the first one.

He was sure that was the right one, as Panama told him it was not.

"I'll chance it," he said, with a smile.

Then he was bothered as to his meeting with Wild Kid on the trail.

The youth had said he would meet him, but nothing had been said of having the prisoner along.

Would Wild Kid think it wise to show himself while Panama was along?

That Buffalo Bill determined to leave to the boy to decide.

He would naturally see him, and that he had a prisoner with him, before he allowed himself to be seen, and so would know best how to act.

So the scout continued on his way, watching only that he was not surprised by any one on the way, as he did not know but that the Don's people might have guarded both trails.

Then, too, the prisoner might have been right in his dread of meeting a band of Indians.

Some ten miles from the old mission the scout came upon a little prairie, a mile across, and with a range of hills in the distance.

There the trail crossed the river and wound along the banks, which the scout's knowledge of the lay of land in general convinced him that the river must wind around and run along at the base of the distant hills.

He asked his prisoner, but the latter was in a mood not to reply.

It was evident that Buffalo Bill had taken the wrong trail—for Panama.

The river was easily forded, the trail followed down the bank, and as the hills were approached the trail seemed to lead away from the stream.

As the slope was reached Buffalo Bill's eyes were upon the trail ahead, going among the hills, and his keen eyes caught sight of a form ahead, appearing for a moment, and then gliding out of sight.

"I think I shall reconnoiter on ahead alone, Adams, but I'll see that your horse does not run away with you," and Buffalo Bill proceeded to tie the animal ridden by the prisoner securely to a tree.

The prisoner was already bound securely to his saddle.

Riding on ahead Buffalo Bill advanced with caution, though he felt sure the form he had caught sight of must be the Wild Kid.

If mistaken, then it would be man against man; but great odds never disturbed Buffalo Bill to any alarming extent.

After several hundred yards the trail wound into the timber belt along the range of hills, and as he was lost sight of to the sharply watching prisoner, he beheld ahead the Wild Kid, for it was a youth he saw.

There he stood in the trail, upright, handsome-faced and waiting.

The scout was at once impressed with the appearance of the youth, just such as he would expect to find his friend of the night before to be.

"I'm the Wild Kid, Chief Cody," informed the youth, with a smile.

"Yes, I am sure of that, for though I did not see you last night, you are just

about like what I pictured you, and I have kept a searching lookout along the trail to find you."

"I saw you several miles back, but dared not signal, as I perceived that you had company, so I came on here and took the chances.

"It is Panama you have, I suppose, but did he see me?"

"No; and I simply explained that I would reconnoiter on ahead."

"Good! Now, you were going to El Monte with your prisoner?"

"Yes, he really is North Adams, a deserter from the army, and a double murderer and thief. I thought I had killed him, but was mistaken."

"So I heard you say last night to him."

"You heard me?" in surprise.

"Oh, yes; for I was on the roof and heard and saw all.

"You see I didn't know just what the Don and his layout might be tempted to do, so I lay low until nearly dawn, and I know that Juan and the peons went out before day to ambush you on the other trail.

"I therefore kept near and was glad when you took my advice and followed the river trail, for you missed the ambush. But if you had been attacked, Wild Kid would have been in the game for all I was worth."

"You are a true friend, Wild Kid, as I have had the best of proof."

"Then take the advice I now give you. If you do not you'll get into big trouble."

"I'll do it, for I feel that I can trust you," was Buffalo Bill's earnest reply.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WILD KID'S ADVICE.

"Now, Chief Cody, I don't know what your business at El Monte is, but you are a brave man to come alone, though I heard your bluff to the Don last night about soldiers following."

"You are a keen one."

"If you needed soldiers here you'd get them from the fort, sixty-five miles south of here, and where I wish you to go now."

"Why?"

"Well, the prisoner you have is a deserter, you say?"

"Yes."

"Down here he is a gambler and a secret member of a very dangerous band.

"I'm not dead sure, but I think the Don is in the gang also, but by pretending not to suspect him we can catch him in a trap, is my idea."

"The very thing, Kid."

"Now, if you take Panama into El Monte, brave as you are, and a man to face any danger, he will be taken from you, for his gang is a strong one, and the good men there will not put their lives in jeopardy, and their homes, too, by taking sides with you.

"You might kill half a dozen, but a bullet will kill a buffalo, and you are but human."

"You are right, Wild Kid."

"So I say to you to skip this trail right here, follow the range right along. I'll sketch you a map of the country and trails, and get into the fort as quickly as you can.

"Leave your prisoner there, and make your way back to this point by day after to-morrow noon, and I'll be on hand to join you.

"I'll go into El Monte and hear what story the Don has sent in of the affair, and see just how the humor of the men stands, for they think I am a bad one, and so will talk freely before me.

"I'll see how matters stand, too, about the attack on Lady Beauty, of Idlerest Ranch, and when you return I'll take you

for the night to my layout and put you on the trail for the homes of Doctor Duke Delmar and Major Brasher, whom you say you have letters to, though I would advise you not to tell your business here to either one of them, for I'll say flatfooted I do not trust the Doc a little bit, and if he has not got the major on a string I'm willing to be licked for lying."

Buffalo Bill laughed, and then said:

"Well, my young friend, I will take your advice and deliver my prisoner for safekeeping at the fort."

"Then I will return and meet you here, and, after all you have done for me, I will be guided by you in regard to my future actions, for you know the country, the people, good and bad, and I do not believe you are half as bad as you paint yourself."

"Give a dog a bad name, and he'll soon begin to think he's the meanest cur in town, for, save the Lady Beauty and four boy pards who will tie to me to the end, I've got no friends; but they say even that we boys are road-agents and all that is bad, though the Vigilantes have never been able to catch us in a single lawless deed."

"We call ourselves Boy Rangers, and though we've fought the Indians and Rio Grande Renegades hard, several times warning the ranches of trouble, they won't believe we are honest, simply because I am said to be a young terror."

"Why, the ranchers keep a closer count on my cattle and ponies than I do myself, to see if I don't add to them by stealing splithoofs and mustangs."

Buffalo Bill eyed the youth fixedly as he was speaking, and seemed to dwell upon every word he uttered.

Then he said:

"So you have a little ranch of your own?"

"Yes, a baby layout, with a couple of hundred longhorns and thirty-odd ponies."

"And you have some pards?"

"I've got a young Mexican pard, Rico Sanchez, though he's a year older than I am, living at my layout with me, along with Sable, a negro boy I picked up, and whose heart is full of good blood, if he has got a bad face."

"Then, on a little ranch below El Monte, I've got two boy pards whom I can call on when I need them, and that is all."

"You see, Rico Sanchez had to leave Mexico or be killed, and was followed across the Rio Grande and wounded; but I happened along and helped him out, and took him to my ranch, while Sable was stood up for a target one day in El Monte by a desperado, and I took his part, so he's stuck to me ever since."

"The other two boys I also helped out of a scrape, and when I call they'll come; but folks will call me a terror, and maybe I am, in a quiet way."

"Well, pard, you are just the one I want to help me, you and your Boy Rangers, and when I return from the fort I'll tell you my business at El Monte," and Buffalo Bill warmly grasped the hand of the "Young Terror."

CHAPTER XIX.

NOT FOR SALE.

After talking together a short while longer, and the scout receiving from the youth a pencil-sketch map of his way, the two parted.

Buffalo Bill at once returned to his prisoner, who was anxiously awaiting him, wondering if Juan Trego and the peons, finding that they had not taken the trail they were expected to take, would run across to still ambush them.

He knew well that if he did not, his only chance would be to raise trouble in

El Monte, and have his comrades free him from the power of the scout, who he feared might make sure of him by killing him.

He could not blame Don Trego, for he felt that he had acted as best he could; but Panama was not one to be taken back a prisoner by Buffalo Bill to the fort from which he had deserted, no matter what the cost might be to others.

So when the scout returned he eyed him closely and asked:

"Did you find anything suspicious?"

"Yes."

"Indians?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Enough to make me leave this trail."

"Ah! I told you so, and you can go back to the other by a five-mile ride—"

"I know the way."

"Thanks, but I do not need your aid, nor will I go back to the other trail."

"Then you return to the Mission Ranch?"

"No."

"I don't know what you'll do, then."

Buffalo Bill had now untied the prisoner's horse and the pack animal, and taking them in lead, to the surprise of Panama, he turned short off of the trail to El Monte.

"Where in the name of Satan are you going?" cried the prisoner.

"I thought I would go to Fort Rio," was the calm reply.

Buffalo Bill saw the start given by the prisoner, and that his face became the hue of death.

"That is not the way to the fort," he faltered.

"I think it is."

"It's over a hundred miles."

"More or less, as you will see when we reach there by night, for I shall push along rapidly."

"My God! man, don't take me there."

"It is just what I intend to do."

"You accuse me of being North Adams, but I am not."

"Quit talking, Adams, for I know just what you are, and that you killed the sergeant who arrested you for robbing the paymaster's quarters, and then shot the guard over you and made your escape."

"As I reported when I followed you that I had killed you, and I believed it to be true, that ended the matter; but as it was my mistake, I will now be glad to atone for it by returning you to General Carr, and to do so, I will take you to Fort Rio for safe keeping, for I know what to expect should I carry you a prisoner to El Monte."

"Come, we must quicken our pace."

Panama groaned, and then gave vent to a string of oaths in English and Spanish.

But Buffalo Bill paid no heed, but kept the horses at a steady trot for several hours, following the direction in which he should go with an exactness that surprised the prisoner, who knew he was a stranger in that part of the country.

At noon Buffalo Bill halted at a small stream for rest.

The grass was plentiful, the water clear and cold, and there was wood in plenty for a fire.

But the scout contented himself with a cold lunch from his supplies, the prisoner eating sparingly.

After a rest of nearly an hour, as Buffalo Bill began to saddle up preparatory to starting on, Panama said:

"See here, Buffalo Bill, every man has his price—what is yours?"

"I haven't got anything for sale just now, Adams."

"Nonsense! You understand me well."

"If you carry me to the fort you'll have me safe."

"Now, nobody knows that I am alive save you, and I will pay you a clean two thousand dollars in gold if you will let me go."

"It is not enough."

"I'm not rich, but I've won some money with cards and trading cattle—"

"And cutting throats."

"I didn't say that."

"No, but I did."

"Well, then, I have that more reason to wish to escape, so if two thousand will not buy you, name what will, and I'll try and meet your price."

"Call it as many millions as you did thousands, and I guess I'd surrender."

"Bah! Do you think I am a fool?"

"Oh, no, and neither am I for sale, Adams," and the journey was resumed.

While resting Buffalo Bill had glanced over Wild Kid's map, and saw that he had made no mistake, and if he continued on a couple of hours more he must get into the trail leading from the south to Fort Rio.

This he did, and pressing on, just as the sun set he caught sight in the distance of the Stars and Stripes fluttering down from the flagstaff at Fort Rio, and heard the sunset gun echoing among the hills.

But what was a great satisfaction for him was despair for his prisoner.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MASKED PURSUERS.

When Wild Kid saw Buffalo Bill return to his prisoner he watched until they had turned off along the range and disappeared from sight.

Then he moved up to where the scout had halted his prisoner, while he came forward on the trail to speak to him.

"I'll just halt here for a while, for Juan and the Don may come along in pursuit, and I can chip in if needed," he said.

So he waited for an hour or more, and then, as no one appeared, began to ride along toward the old mission.

He had gone about a mile, when his pony, which he had named scamp, pricked up his ears.

"Some one is coming—yes, I hear hoofs, and they are in a hurry, and more than one."

The next moment there dashed into sight four masked men.

They were riding hard, and their horses showed that they had been kept at a speedy gait for some distance.

"The Don and his inaps—masks don't fool me a little bit," muttered the youth.

A moment more and they had halted, while one called out:

"Ho, Wild Kid, did you see two men pass along this trail?"

"Yes, Don Trego. One was Panama, and the other was a large, splendid-looking man."

"You call me Don?"

"Yes, for I'm onto you, and Juan and the two Coppers. Masks don't go with me, Don Trego, and I didn't know you sported them. Thought only bad men did that."

"We had a purpose for wearing them, for that fine-looking man you speak of has killed two men at my ranch and has Panama a prisoner."

"Pan did look tied up."

"How far ahead of us are they, Kid?"

"Well, I should say too far for you to catch them, for it's been over an hour since I met them, and the big man was pushing his hoofs for all they were worth."

"Caraniba!" ejaculated the Don, and Juan echoed the oath, while Wild Kid said innocently:

"If it is so important for you to overtake him, Don, I'll lend you my pony, for

he's fresh, and your horse could never do it."

"We took the wrong trail, and had to cross from the other one to this, and have pushed our horses too hard."

"Juan, we must give it up, for they'd reach El Monte before we could head them off. But you, Wild Kid, can do something for me if you will," said the Don.

"You bet I will, for I have not forgotten the good suppers the senora gave me when I stopped at your ranch, Don."

"All right. Come when you will, for you are welcome."

"In fact, Wild Kid, I'm anxious to have a talk with you some time, for there is money in it for both of us."

"Don't forget me in the deal, Don. But what can I do for you now?"

"Go on to El Monte and tell Brimstone Bill that Buffalo Bill, the great scout of the Northwest, is the man that has Panama a prisoner, and that he is not Fred Williams, as he calls himself."

"Ge! but I'd like to see Buffalo Bill!" cried the boy, with enthusiasm.

"You did see him, for he was the one you met with Panama."

"But how was I to know it then?"

"Well, you'll see him at El Monte, and you tell Brimstone Bill that I sent you to say that Buffalo Bill stopped at my ranch last night, as did Panama, Mustang Matt and Half Breed Jose."

"They had a row of some kind to settle, and Buffalo Bill killed Mott and Jose, and took Panama a prisoner."

"Of course, as I knew Buffalo Bill was a Government officer, I could do nothing, but you tell Brimstone Bill who he is, and that he is in this country for scalps, but to keep it dark, for if they don't know who he is they won't know him as an officer of the army, and so if Fred Williams gets killed it will be his own fault for not saying who he was."

"Do you understand, Kid?"

"You bet I do, and I'll tell Bill."

"All right; but remember you tell no one else but Brimstone Bill that I sent you."

"No one else but Bill, Don."

"Well, if you have any big news to report come out to-morrow or next day to the Mission Ranch and let me hear it, for you will not forget it."

"You bet I won't," and, wheeling his pony, Wild Kid dashed back on the trail in a sweeping gallop.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE THREAT.

Wild Kid's expression would not have pleased the Don, could he have seen it, as he rode back on the trail.

The youth kept up his rapid pace as long as he was in sight of the Don and those with him, and then drew rein, going at a walk.

When he reached the hills he halted and waited.

He wished to see if the Don would change his mind and go on to El Monte himself or send Juan.

But he soon felt convinced that he had left the mission wholly in his hands.

Then he mounted and rode slowly away to the right, muttering to himself:

"Well, it's about time I had something to eat, for yesterday's dinner was my last wrestle with grub."

"Now I'm glad I headed that gang off, for they'd have seen that the trail they were on led to the fort and guessed why, and maybe they could have headed Buffalo Bill off somewhere by hard riding, knowing the country as they do."

"Now I'll go to Ranch Lookout and tell Rico and Sable just what has happened, and when I've made up for lost time in eat-

ing, I'll mount Skip and make for El Monte to tell Brimstone Bill."

"Oh, yes; I'll tell him all the Don told me, but in my own way, and I know a Bill I'll tell in the right way."

With this he urged his pony into a canter and kept him at it mile after mile.

At last he turned from the prairie toward a wooded ridge, and just after noon came upon a little house nestling away under a cliff that ended abruptly at the prairie that spread out like the ocean from its base.

There was a log cabin of two rooms, stoutly built, and with a stockade corral behind it.

A spring flowed out of the cliff, and had been turned to run through the corral, which was a couple of acres in size.

Along the front of the house was a brush shelter forming a piazza, and from there the country around could be seen from three sides for miles.

On the prairie the other side of the ridge were a herd of a couple of hundred cattle feeding and two dozen or more ponies.

Lying before the door of the cabin was a huge dog, that arose as the youth rode up, while upon the cliff, fifty feet above the little home, was a match for the savage brute below.

The latter seemed to be on watch, for he kept his eyes continually roving around the country, and though the youth had come along the base of the range, the point of lookout had enabled him to see him when a long distance off.

"Ho, Catchem, where are Rico and Sable?" said Wild Kid, as he dismounted at the corral gate.

But as he spoke a dark-faced, slender youth came from behind the cabin and called out, with a slight Spanish accent to his English:

"Ho, Kid, I'm awful glad to see you, for we were getting anxious about you."

"Watch signaled you coming half an hour ago, and Sable will soon have dinner ready."

"I'm glad, Rico, for I have had nothing since I cooked my own dinner in the mountains yesterday, but I won't complain, for I'm loaded to the muzzle with news," and Wild Kid turned his horse loose as he spoke, while the young Mexican, who had a handsome face, that only his black mustache kept from being effeminate, said:

"And I have news for you, for Major Brasher, Doctor Delmar and half a dozen cowboys from the latter's ranch were here after you this morning."

"What did they want with me, Rico?" quietly asked the youth.

"They said that you had put up a game to pretend to kidnap Lady Beauty, so you might gain favor by a supposed rescue, and pretending to kill one of the men, while the other two escaped."

"Is that the latest lie against me, Rico?" asked the youth, while a bitter smile crossed his face.

"Yes, and they came after you, they said, to take you to El Monte and have the Vigilantes take you in charge."

"I'm going to El Monte to-night, so they can find me if I'm wanted, Rico."

"I told them that you were away, had gone to Hacienda del Norte day before yesterday, with some ponies to sell, and should have been back last night; but that if you had met the Senorita Brasher and rescued her from kidnappers, it was no sham rescue, as I would vouch for."

"What did they say then?"

"That they wanted you to know they were aware of your trick to win favor with the senorita and her father, and they would drop the matter with a warning that you would get into trouble if you

ever went near Idlerest Ranch, or spoke to her again."

"It was Doctor Delmar who did all the talking and threatening."

"I thought so; but I should have thought the dead man, El Monte Ed, would prove that it was no sham rescue, as well as Lady Beauty's report of it."

"Doc Delmar said no one was killed, that he and his men went to the scene and nobody was there, and that the man fell at your fire, pretending to be shot, while, of course, he said that I was in it with you, and our two ranch parls, Mer-ton Calder and Ham Goldsby."

"Rico, I'll tell you now that Texas is not large enough for that Doctor Duke Delmar and me to live in. One of us must quit," said Wild Kid, with deep feeling.

CHAPTER XXII.

ABOUT EL MONTE AND ITS PEOPLE.

Ere more was said between Wild Kid and the young Mexican, a negro youth came from behind the cabin, whence an odor of broiling venison and coffee had been wafted for some time.

The negro was of stout build, had an intensely black face, teeth as white as milk and large, expressive eyes.

He was of stout build, and seemed fond of dress, for he wore a Mexican jacket, buckskin leggings, stuck in top boots, and a sombrero embroidered in silver, and with a stuffed rattlesnake around it as a cord.

"Lor', Mars' Kid, I mor'n glad to see you back, for we was beginnin' ter worry 'bout yer."

"But dinner is all ready, and I guesses you is hungry, so come right along, for I knows senor is ready and I allers is."

Wild Kid grasped the hand of the negro boy and they went to a sheltered nook behind the cabin and under the cliff, where a fire burned, and a rude table and seats were set beneath a shelter.

Wild Kid needed no urging to eat, and the appetite he had brought with him was a surprise to both Rico Sanchez and Sable.

But provisions were plentiful in Look-out Ranch, and Sable was only too glad to see Wild Kid eat, helping him bountifully.

The story of the youth's adventures, from his returning from the Hacienda del Norte, and rescue of Marie Brasher, to his leaving the Don and his party, whom he had turned back from the pursuit of Buffalo Bill, was all told to his Mexican and negro parls, the two listening with the deepest interest.

"Well, Kid, you have had a time of it, and I only wish I had been along, for I would so have liked to see Buffalo Bill, whom you have served so well, and of whom I have heard so much."

"You'll see him before long, Rico, for he will come by here with me day after to-morrow, when I meet him."

"But do you really intend to go to El Monte to-night, Kid?"

"Yes."

"Better not, Mars' Kid, for I remember what d'em fellers is there—I doesn't like 'em a little tiny bit, and they don't like you."

"That's all right, Sable, but I wish to go particularly, to get on the trail of certain things I have in mind, and which I'll call on all of you to help me in when I am ready to act."

"I had better go to El Monte with you, Kid."

"No, Rico, it will be best for me to go alone, especially as I bear a message from Don Trego to Brimstone Bill, and I'll start pretty soon."

Ten minutes after, mounted upon a

fresh pony, and one equally as good as Scamp, he started off on his ride of twenty-five miles to El Monte, the settlement made up of a few stores, a couple of blacksmith and wagon repair shops, a dozen drinking and gambling saloons, a combined school-house, court-room, church and public hall, which had been the scene of deadly encounters, with a score of log-cabin houses and an alleged hotel.

The regular dwellers in El Monte numbered some three hundred souls, the "floating population" of wagon train people, emigrants passing through, ranchers and cowboys, with a mingling of itinerant gamblers and fugitives from justice more than doubling the number of those who were proud to call themselves El Monteites.

With half a hundred ranches within a radius of as many miles, and employing from two to twenty cowboys each, El Monte had a large number to draw upon in the way of frequenters of its saloons, and they were wont to make things lively there at times, and keep the place "on the jump," so to speak, from noon until day-break.

It was Wild Kid's wish to reach El Monte after nightfall.

He considered it safer, as just then he was anxious to avoid trouble.

He was never before afraid to go there at any time, for Wild Kid was not one to avoid danger, and he had made his mark even in such a community as that of El Monte.

Who the boy was no one there knew, and he often said that he did not himself know; that he was a product of the prairie, like a weed, and just grew, but whether he told the truth in this nobody could say.

He had been known in El Monte for four years, stopping there with a number of people from a wagon train that had been terribly cut up in a fight with Indians.

The boy wrote a good hand, was bright, quiet, and got work in the hotel as clerk, being cashier of a gambling saloon at night.

His first display of "border talent" had been when a couple of roughs tried to rob him, and he shot one dead and held the other up, the Vigilantes hanging him an hour after.

Then he had distinguished himself by taking the part of Sable, the negro boy, whom some desperadoes were torturing for fun, and in the stand-up fight that followed the boy won the admiration of all by his nerve and deadly aim.

On another occasion he took sides with two youths, Merton Calder, and Ham Goldsby, who had come to Texas to seek a fortune, and he helped them out of a very ugly scrape, as afterward he aided Henrique Sanchez, whom he called Rico.

Giving up his clerkship, he had gone off beyond the border of the settlement proper and started a ranch, with Rico Sanchez and the negro Sable as his parads, and he had prospered.

Thrice had he warned the settlement of a raid by the Renegades of the Rio Grande, and again saved the ranches from being surprised by Indians, for he was constantly on the trail, being a devoted hunter of large game.

Ever ready with his revolver if imposed on, a sure winner if he gambled, utterly fearless, suspected of many crimes he was guiltless of, Wild Kid gained the name of a young terror and desperado, and those allied with him, and who called themselves Boy Rangers, were regarded by many as no more than a band of young outlaws.

It was just as dark had set in that the boy rancher saw the lights of El

Monte loom up ahead, and soon after he rode into the corral of the Lone Star Hotel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WILD KID VISITS GOLD MINE SALOON.

El Monte was in full blast when Wild Kid rode into the corral of the Lone Star Hotel, the latter being a rambling structure of adobe, which at one time in the dim past had been a mission house.

About it was a thick growth of timber, evidently planted by the good padres of generations before, and scattered along the one street, or trail, that ran through the place were the stores, saloons and cabin homes of the citizens.

Off on the prairie on either side were the stockade corrals where horses and cattle were kept for sale, and upon the stream that ran around the hill or mount, upon which the settlement was located, and from which it took its name, were the ruins of a fort built by the United States troops back in the fifties, and here was the camping ground of army and emigrant trains passing through.

The story had already been told in El Monte of the attempted kidnapping of Major Brasher's beautiful daughter, and her rescue by the Wild Kid, but following upon the news had quickly come the report that it was a fake affair gotten up by the Boy Ranger to win the regard of Lady Beauty.

There were some who believed the report of a fake rescue, others who did not, for be the faults of the Wild Kid what they might, he was not one to seek cheap notoriety.

El Monte Ed, a rough citizen of the place, was said to have been killed by the boy, but yet if it was not true, the man did not show up, though his friends said he had gone northward with a large herd of cattle.

It was certain, however, that the body of the man said to have been killed could not be found, nor could his horse, while the two with him were not known.

What Lady Beauty said of the affair could not be learned, though Doctor Delmar, the man who had the inside track in her regard, it was believed, asserted that Miss Brasher believed that the man who fell at Wild Kid's shot was playing possum, the others running off to carry out the boy's plot, to get the credit of a daring rescue.

It was while the affair was still being discussed in the "Gold Mine," the most popular gambling den in El Monte, that Wild Kid appeared, strolling into the crowded place in his free-and-easy way, and glancing about as though anxious to find some one.

"There's the fake hero now, doc," said a large man, with long, fiery red hair and beard falling to his waist, who was standing by a table where two others were playing cards with a large pile of money up as the stakes.

One of these men was a Mexican who was said to be an army officer and very rich, and who often crossed the river to visit El Monte to gamble.

He had a dark, refined face, and seemed to enjoy playing, which was a passion with him, though he almost invariably was a loser.

He was known in El Monte as El Capitán, but at Major Brasher's ranch, where he visited when coming across upon Texan soil, he was called Captain Miguel Munoz, and, if Doctor Duke Delmar was not his rival, many thought that he would be the favorite suitor for the hand of Lady Beauty.

His companion now at the card-table, and to whom the red-headed and bearded

man had spoken when Wild Kid entered, was Doctor Delmar.

He was one who might more readily be taken for a clergyman, for his handsome face was clean shaven, his hair clustered in short ringlets about his temples, he wore gold-rimmed eye-glasses and dressed in black broadcloth, well-polished top boots, with silver spurs and a slouch hat.

His frock coat was open, however, and beneath it was a belt of arms, and he had more than once shown that he knew how to use them.

He was a fine surgeon and physician, and generally popular, while he owned a large ranch and was rich, for he added to his income by being a most successful gambler.

Though rivals, the doctor and Captain Miguel Munoz were devoted friends.

Glancing up at Wild Kid when Brimstone Bill, the man with fiery red hair and beard attracted his attention to him, he said:

"I'll see him later. Now I'm playing for big money."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SHOT FOR SHOT.

Something of a hush fell upon the room as Wild Kid entered.

All felt that he had made a mistake in coming there, for he would be accused of putting up a fake rescue of Lady Beauty, and he was not one to submit to ridicule.

Brimstone Bill was known as the friend of El Monte Ed, whom, it was said, Wild Kid had either killed or bribed to play possum for his sake, and the aforesaid William had justly won the prefix of Brimstone to his name.

He was the most dreaded man in the settlement, and one who was a dead shot and full of nerve.

When Wild Kid caught sight of him, he walked straight up to him and said in a low tone

"I've got a message for you, Brimstone Bill."

The man had never liked the youth, and he now said with a sneer:

"From my friend Ed whom you claim to have killed, I s'pose?"

"No; it is from your friends Mustang Matt and Half Breed Jose," was the cool reply, and the boy looked quickly from the face of Brimstone Bill to that of Doctor Delmar.

He saw the start of the former and the quick look that Doctor Delmar gave, followed by a sign that no one else caught.

"All right, young feller, I takes mighty leetle stock in you, but if my parads has sent you to me I'll hear what yer has ter say."

"I don't ask you to take any stock in me, Brimstone Bill, and don't care for your love or hatred; but I was sent to you, and if you care to hear what I have to say you can follow me outside."

"I'll go yer," and another strange look passed between Brimstone Bill and Doctor Delmar, the latter urging the man to go, as Wild Kid interpreted it.

"Do not go, Senor Beel, for he weel you assassinate," called out Captain Miguel Munoz, in a tone that all heard, and a silence followed the words.

Instantly Wild Kid faced him and said: "El Capitan, none but a coward would give such an insult."

The Mexican sprang to his feet, drawing a weapon as he did so, and, with a savage oath, upsetting the table and spilling the money, while the crowd scattered in all directions out of the line of fire.

Wild Kid did not move, and even at such a moment he seemed to see the ridiculous side of the affair in the men tumbling over each other, and laughed.

But, as the Mexican got to his feet, revolver in hand, Wild Kid had his weapon ready, and seeing that the man intended to kill him, he touched the trigger a second in advance of his foe.

It was enough, for it saved his life, his shot striking the Mexican in the left side, while the latter's bullet cut through the rim of Wild Kid's hat.

Doctor Delmar caught the Mexican in his arms as he staggered back, and cried: "You have done for him, boy. I'll see you later."

Again came the boy's reckless laugh, and then the words:

"So you said before, doc. No time like the present."

Whatever Doctor Delmar would have done, a quickly whispered word from Brimstone Bill checked him, and he called for aid to carry the wounded Mexican to his room in the Lone Star Hotel.

Wild Kid had replaced his weapon, but stood his ground, until Brimstone Bill grasped him by the arm and whispered:

"Come with me, boy, or the Vigilantes will hang yer up."

"No; the Vigilantes may make mistakes now and then, but they won't hang a boy for killing a man who insulted him, and fought a fair stand-up fight."

"He did start it, that's a fact. But yer wants ter see me, yer said?" and Brimstone Bill seemed a trifle nervous.

As Wild Kid moved toward the door some one shouted out that he had only defended himself, and called for a cheer, and Brimstone Bill joined in the rousing shout that followed.

"Now, boy pard, what has yer from Mustang Matt and Half Breed Jose fer me?" asked Brimstone Bill, as the two walked away out of earshot from any one near by.

"Don Trego sent me to tell you that they were both dead."

The man almost staggered under the blow, and cried, in a hoarse voice:

"What kilt 'em?"

"Buffalo Bill, the great scout of the Northwest," was the quiet response of the boy.

CHAPTER XXV.

WILD KID LEARNS SOMETHING.

The words of the youth seemed to impress Brimstone Bill strangely, for he muttered to himself over and over:

"Dead! and Matt knew the secret only. I've been a fool, for El Monte Ed is dead!"

"Yes, Brimstone Bill, I killed El Monte Ed, as you know; but he was masked, as were also Matt and Jose, and all I saw were three men with their hands on Lady Beauty, so I acted just as you would have done if you had not then known how it all was, and was not in the secret of who they were, and supposed they were raiders from over the Rio Grande.

"But when I saw who El Monte Ed was, then I did not understand just what to do, after seeing Lady Beauty home, I came back to take their trail, thinking from all I knew, they had gone to the Mission Ranch.

"And they had, and Panama too, and they found there Buffalo Bill, and he was on his way to El Monte."

"Coming here?" cried Brimstone Bill, in alarm.

"Yes," and in the same manner, feeling his way for points and trying to trap Brimstone Bill, Wild Kid continued:

"They planned—Panama, Matt and Jose—to down Buffalo Bill, whom they had not seen, but they knew he was there.

"You see Panama, who had been a soldier in the Northwest, recognized him, and they planned to catch him asleep; but he didn't sleep, and saw them coming, so

killed Matt and Jose, and took Panama alive."

"The deuce he did!"

"I would not believe any man alive, not even Buffalo Bill, could get the best of those three men," and in his excitement Brimstone Bill had dropped his dialect and incorrect way of speaking.

"Well, he did, and he's gone off with Panama to the fort."

"My God! can he not be headed?"

"No; for I tracked him, and he's there now."

"And he'll come back with a troop of cavalry to back him?"

"No, I guess not; for, you see, he goes as Fred Williams, and was only recognized by Panama.

"He has come here on some secret service, and will come into El Monte alone, you bet!"

"Then he goes under right here, for we can fix it."

"You see, I was with the Don, Juan and the peons on his trail, and the Don sent me on to tell you.

"But Major Brasher and Doc Delmar were hunting me, so I had to keep in hiding and was late; but I determined to put you on your guard against Buffalo Bill, as the Don asked me to do, so I braved trouble with the doc and came here tonight, and yet I got into it with both feet, for I could not let Captain Munoz say what he did to me, and he did not know I was one of you, I guess, or Doctor Delmar, either, and he says he's got to settle with me after a while."

"No, he won't, for I'll go right in and have a talk with him, and tell him you come from the Don, who vouches for you.

"I guess the doc would like to have a talk with you, for we want you, boy, and we didn't just know how to take you and your gang."

"What made the doc say that was a fake rescue of Lady Beauty, and cart El Monte's body off to prove it?"

"Had to, Wild Kid, had to; but the doc didn't think you could be trusted then, you see."

"Well, I can."

"I should think so; but I'll go in and see Doc Delmar and tell him the news you bring, for he knows Buffalo Bill, as I do, and we don't want to see him until we know just what to do."

"Well, you just tell Doc Delmar, if he's got anything against me, I'm in the Gold Mine Saloon, and we can have it out; but I'm not going to let him or any other man put me up for a fool."

"You bet you won't, boy pard; but I'll fix it, and I guess the doc will want to see you. But, Lordy! how you did scatter the money in yonder, and call on El Capitan to hand you his chips—for I guess he's cashed 'em in.

"But I'll see the doc, but don't get into another row, for we need you, Wild Kid."

"All right," and while Brimstone Bill hastened to the Lone Star, Wild Kid sauntered into the Gold Mine, where all was in full swing once more, as a tragedy in their midst made but little impression on the men gathered there.

"I guess I've learned something, and I'm on the trail to learn more," muttered Wild Kid as he entered the saloon, where he was greeted with a shout by some of his admirers and a scowl by those who did not like him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DYING MEXICAN.

Refusing a score of invitations to "take something," for Wild Kid never drank anything, never touched tobacco or uttered an oath, in spite of his wild life, he walked up to a table where half a dozen

men were gambling heavily, and took a position that gave him equal command of the two doors, in case Doctor Delmar should return to carry out his threat to "see him later."

He had not been there very long before Brimstone Bill entered hastily, and called out:

"Here, boy pard, I wants you. No, gents, this hain't no fight, but business, for a dying man has got something to say to the Wild Kid."

The crowd seemed disappointed, while Wild Kid walked quickly to the door and joined Brimstone Bill, who said:

"I has seen Doc Delmar and it's all right.

"He wants to talk with you later, Kid; but just now El Capitan is crowdin' along on his last trail, and he has got something to say ter yer, he says, and there's no time ter lose.

"Yer see, I thought he wanted ter kill yer, but he hain't got a weapon, and it's something he wants ter git off his mind, so as ter let him lie easy in ther grave."

Brimstone Bill had hastened Wild Kid along to the room where El Capitan had been taken, and there lay the dying Mexican upon a cot, Doctor Duke Delmar, the landlord and his wife by his side.

As the two entered the room Brimstone Bill called out cheerily:

"Hold on, El Capitan, he's here."

The Mexican muttered a prayer in Spanish, and Doctor Delmar stepped forward and extending his hand, said in a low tone:

"It's all right between us, Wild Kid; we are pards."

"If you say so," was Wild Kid's response, and the next instant he stood by the man whom his bullet had brought down.

The pallor of death was already creeping over the face of Miguel Munoz, and he said, as he raised his hand with an effort:

"I brought it upon myself, Wild Kid, and I forgive you, as I hope you will forgive me, for I meant to kill you—I had a reason more than others knew."

"Don't mention it, senor, for I never hold ill-will—you played your card, and I held a winning hand.

"What can I do for you?"

"I wish to be alone with you."

Doctor Delmar led all from the room, and, seated by the cot, the youth heard what the Mexican had to tell.

It was a long story of crime, of a man born to riches and good name, who had gone wrong because he lost the woman he had loved, and who had sought to kill his rival, an American officer, who married the fair Mexican, who had discarded him, her cousin, Miguel Munoz.

Dismissed from the army, he had gone from bad to worse, until he had become an outlaw, and was then chief of the Mexican band of the Renegades of the Rio Grande.

But he had sought revenge upon his rival through his son, who had been kidnapped in youth, discovered after years to find his mother dead and to be told also that his American father had cruelly deserted his Mexican wife.

But Miguel Munoz had not then ended his revenge, for the boy, taking his mother's name, had been falsely accused of crime of which he (Munoz) was guilty, and he had been forced to fly from Mexico.

That boy was then with Wild Kid, known as Henrico Sanchez, and the confession of Miguel Munoz, with the proofs he would give Wild Kid, would enable the young man to return to Mexico and claim his just inheritance.

But there was more to tell, and that was that the American officer had not deserted

his Mexican wife, but had been led to believe that she had deserted him, all through the plotting of Miguel Munoz, and that he had learned of her death and soon after married an American lady.

But Miguel Munoz still dogged him with his revenge, for the two children of the American officer by his second marriage had been kidnapped from a fort on the Rio Grande, and the sorrowing parents had never been able to find them since, nor could Munoz give any clue to them or their fate.

Such was the confession of the dying Mexican, and Wild Kid promised that he would seek the American officer, then a colonel in the United States Army, and stationed in the Northwest, and place before him the papers and proofs of the story told, and also let Henrico Sanchez know of the fortune in store for him.

Calling Doctor Delmar and the others into the room, Wild Kid resumed his seat by the dying man, and there remained until the spark of life had fluttered away into boundless space.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MEETING.

If Wild Kid was impressed by the remarkable scene through which he had passed with the man he had killed, his face did not show it.

There rested upon his countenance the same determined, reckless, half-bitter look natural to him, and he turned from the dead Mexican to have a talk with Doctor Delmar.

With the latter he felt his way as cleverly as he had with Brimstone Bill, and from what he got out of the latter, then from the dying Mexican, and last from Doctor Delmar, he felt that he had material enough to act upon, and act he would.

He first expressed his determination to return to the Don, according to promise, and tell what he had done, as requested, and bear back the news of what the doctor and Brimstone Bill intended to do as regarded Buffalo Bill's coming to El Monte.

A long talk was held, and then Doctor Delmar said:

"Tell the Don of the death of Munoz and how the killing of El Monte Ed, Mustang Matt and Half Breed Jose, and the capture of Panama cut us down to himself, Juan, and the peons at the old mission, Brimstone Bill—four men here and myself, in El Monte, and you, Wild Kid, for I do not suppose we can count on Sanchez, now he is an heir, and there is no time for you to get Calder and Goldsby to help us."

"But Brimstone and his men will go with me to head off Buffalo Bill on his return from the fort, and we will ambush him in Black Rock Canyon."

"If we miss him, why, we will come on to El Monte, and the Don and Juan, and you, must meet us here two nights hence, and we'll show that the great scout can be killed as easily as any other man."

"Now, you will start back to-night, of course?"

"Yes, Doc Delmar, at once; and if Rico Sanchez does not get the big head when he hears of his fortune, he'll come with me ready for business. If you don't down Buffalo Bill on the trail at Black Rock, why, it can be done in El Monte."

"It must be, for that man knows enough to hang half of the men in El Monte," was the emphatic reply.

Half an hour after, having had a mid-night supper, and with his pony well rested, Wild Kid was dashing along directly for his ranch.

He arrived before dawn, his advent being signaled by the barking of the two

dogs. What he had to say was the cause of three horsemen dashing away from Lookout Ranch in the early gray of dawn, leaving the dogs only in charge, for the three were Wild Kid, Henrico Sanchez and Sable.

There was a led horse along, a splendid animal, who carried not even a saddle.

The ride was a hard one, no halt being made, and several hours after sunrise they had ridden twenty-five miles and drew rein at a secluded spot on the trail from Fort Rio to El Monte.

There the horses were stripped of their saddles, as soon as Wild Kid had closely examined the trail, and the party partook of a cold breakfast.

Hardly had they finished when hoof-falls were heard, and soon after a horseman appeared in sight, riding at a canter. It was Buffalo Bill.

He was ready to fight the instant he caught sight of the three youths, but, recognizing Wild Kid, he came on.

"I'm behind time, Wild Kid, for I was delayed by a brush with redskins a few miles back; but this is not where you were to meet me?"

"It's a better place, as six men are lying in ambush for you at Black Rock Canyon, half a dozen miles ahead."

"But I've got lots to tell you, as soon as you know that this is my Mexican pard, Henrico Sanchez, and this is Sable, the boss of all the darkies I ever crossed the trail of. We are all here to fight it out with you, if you say the word, or to do just as you think best, for we are in it to stay."

Buffalo Bill smiled, shook hands with the young Mexican and Sable, and said:

"I think it is for you to say, Wild Kid, from all I have thus far seen of you."

"Now, what is the racket? Split it out, and I'll know what to do," and the four sat down for a talk.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FIGHT TO THE FINISH.

Buffalo Bill listened attentively to the whole story Wild Kid had to tell, of his meeting with Don Trego and his party, and how he had played his cards; of the visit to his ranch and ride to El Monte; of the duel with Captain Miguel Munoz, the dying confession, and his talk with Brimstone Bill and Doctor Delmar, ending with:

"Now I told you, Chief Cody, not to trust Doctor Delmar, and I meant it, for I've long had an idea he was playing a double game, though I could not spot him."

"The major is not bad, I think, but the Doc has a pull on him of some kind, to make him do as he says."

"Doctor Delmar, in my opinion, is chief of the American band of Renegades of the Rio Grande, with Brimstone Bill as his right hand man, Don Trego and his gang as allies, and four men in El Monte as members, Panama being secured, and El Monte Ed, Mustang Matt, and Half Breed Jose having passed in their chips."

"The Doc, Brimstone Bill and four others are laying for you, and if they miss you, the Don and his gang are to meet them in El Monte and do you up there, so my idea is that you go home with us, send Sable here on this led horse to the fort for a troop to come to El Monte, arriving at a certain time. We will all be on hand to go in with them and bag the game."

"Right you are, Wild Kid, and I'll write a note at once for Sable to carry to Colonel Gibbons, at Fort Rio; then we'll meet the troop and just take El Monte in to-morrow night."

The note was written, Sable saddled up the led horse, and with his own following

for a change, started with all speed for Fort Rio.

After his departure the scout and his two boy backers mounted, and under the guidance of Wild Kid they started for Lookout Ranch.

Leaving the hills, they were crossing the prairie, when suddenly they saw a party of horsemen dash over a rise.

Both parties halted, and Wild Kid said, coolly:

"It's all up, for it's Doctor Delmar and his gang, six of them, and they see us."

"They were late in getting into Black Rock, which lies four miles west of them."

"Then it's a fight at two to one, boys—or is it a race?" asked Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"I'd rather fight than run any day," Wild Kid remarked.

"I've fought odds all my life, Chief," said Henrico Sanchez.

"Well, then, young pards, we'll make forts of our horses and fight it out. Here they come!"

With a word and a touch on the legs, Buffalo Bill's horse dropped down flat on the prairie, he having left his pack animal at Fort Rio as his base of operations.

The ponies of the two boy rangers obeyed the command of their riders, and lay down also, and the three dropped behind the horses, resting their rifles over their saddles, for the six men were coming rapidly forward now, having recognized Buffalo Bill, and also that, as they meant to fight, Wild Kid had trapped them.

Buffalo Bill was upon the right, Henrico Sanchez next to him, and Wild Kid on the left, as they waited their coming foes, two to one against them.

The attacking party began to fire at long range, their rifles, however, doing no damage, but when Buffalo Bill leveled his weapon he said, quietly:

"I'll reduce the majority, boys."

With the crack of his rifle Brimstone Bill fell from his saddle, and as the party, finding the superior range of the scout's weapon, turned to fly, a second shot brought down Doctor Delmar's horse, the death-stricken animal rearing and falling backward upon his rider.

"Up, boy rangers, and at them! It is our time to strike now!" cried Buffalo Bill, as he saw that the doctor did not rise.

"Even as he uttered the words there came a shout in their rear, and there the three beheld Sable, guiding a troop of cavalry."

Instantly the troop deployed into a long line, and the four outlaws found themselves hemmed in; but, trying to break through, were at once shot down.

"Colonel Gibbons was anxious about you, Cody, so sent me with my troop to follow you to El Monte, and meeting your black courier, as your letter was open I read it, so he led us right back on your trail," explained Captain Plummer, as he met Buffalo Bill.

"You were in time to catch the whole outfit here, sir, for I killed one, and Doctor Delmar is badly hurt by his horse falling upon him, I see; but these, my Boy Rangers, will guide you to Don Trego's Mission Ranch, where four more of the outlaws await capture," said Buffalo Bill.

Doctor Duke Delmar was found to be mortally hurt, but he would utter no word other than curses upon Wild Kid, who appeared not to heed them in the least.

An hour after he had been crushed by the fall of his horse he died, and with the other dead man was taken on to El Monte, while Captain Plummer, led by Wild Kid and Henrico Sanchez, and accompanied

By Buffalo Bill and a dozen soldiers, went on to the Mission Ranch, where the Don, finding the game was up, shot himself.

Juan, being absent with one of the peons, escaped, and the other peon was killed, while the senora, professing ignorance of her husband's and son's evil life, declared she would remain still at the ranch with the Indian woman. And she did.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

The soldiers camped that night at the Mission Ranch, and, for the sake of the woman, the Don was decently buried, Buffalo Bill promising to send out from El Monte a couple of cowboys to care for the cattle and place.

On the way to El Monte they halted at Lookout Ranch, and saw how the boy rangers lived, Sable exerting himself to set before the party a splendid dinner.

From there the troopers were sent on into El Monte, while Captain Plummer, Buffalo Bill, Wild Kid and Henrico Sanchez started for the ranch of Doctor Delmar.

That the doctor was all that was bad—that he was leading a double life, they had ample proof of from what Wild Kid knew, but no one at his home seemed to be aware that he was other than he professed to be.

The home was a comfortable one, well stocked, and he had there everything to make him contented with life if he had not possessed a heart of evil.

Among his papers were found documents which proved that he had always led a wild and sinful life, and had fled from his boyhood home on account of forgery and other crimes, though he had graduated in medicine high in his class, and would have made an honored name for himself but for the streak of bad he had in his nature.

Enough was also discovered from his papers to show that the hold he held upon Major Brasher was one of fear. The major had killed a man long years before, under circumstances of justifiable homicide, but with only one person to prove this.

That one was the father of Duke Delmar, and hating the major, for some cause, he allowed him to become a fugitive.

The elder Delmar's papers fell into the son's hands, and thus Duke Delmar held the secret, and thus compelled the major to consent to his attentions to his daughter, the beautiful Marie.

That the major knew Doctor Delmar as he really was, all felt sure was not the case; particularly was Wild Kid convinced of this fact.

Captain Plummer and Buffalo Bill were glad to learn these facts, as Major Brasher had once been an honored officer of the army.

From the Delmar ranch they rode over to Idlerest, Wild Kid acting as guide.

It was a surprise to Major Brasher, his wife and Lady Beauty, when they saw Wild Kid coming to the ranch, accompanied by the splendid looking scout and an army officer.

They were in ignorance of the happenings of the past forty-eight hours, and the major looked suspiciously at Wild Kid, while both Mrs. Brasher and Marie stepped forward and greeted him warmly.

Nothing abashed, Wild Kid did the "introduction act," as he called it, and presented Captain Plummer and Buffalo Bill to the major and the ladies.

Buffalo Bill was well known to all by name, while Captain Plummer was known

to be a distinguished young officer at Fort Rio, so they received a warm welcome.

It fell upon Captain Plummer to tell of the late happenings, and all noticed the start of pleasure Major Brasher gave as he was informed of the death of Doctor Delmar.

As for Marie, she did not change countenance—a proof that she was not in love with the wicked man.

That it was Doctor Delmar who had planned the kidnapping of Marie, to force her into a secret marriage with him, came out, and also that the proofs existed of the major's having killed the man he had slain purely in self-defense.

Then it was Buffalo Bill's time to say a word, and he reported that he had letters to the major and also to Doctor Delmar—that he had come to Texas upon a double mission, one being to track certain deserters from the army guilty of other crimes, and that in Panama, Brimstone Bill and Mustang Matt he had found the men he sought.

His other mission was to look up the children of Captain Kidd Poisal, stolen in their younger years.

One of them he was sure he had found, from all he could learn of him and his past, in the wail of the prairies, known as Wild Kid, the Texan Terror.

The girl he had yet to discover.

With a glance at his wife, Major Brasher then spoke:

"I must tell the truth, sir, for the daughter of Colonel Kidd Poisal is before you, in this young lady, supposed to be our own child. We bought her from a Mexican woman when she was a very little girl. She had a little brother, as we then knew, but we took only the girl, and now a resemblance that has often struck us is explained, for Wild Kid there is Marie's brother, beyond a doubt."

It would be hard to tell of what followed, all being excited save Wild Kid, who presently remarked:

"If Colonel Kidd Poisal was the father of Lady Beauty and myself, then Rico is our half-brother, for his father bore the same name and was first married to a Mexican lady, Senorita Rita Sanchez, as Captain Miguel Munoz told me in his dying confession.

"We are getting located and labeled all around, but, much as I like Sable, I'll draw the line at having him tabbed as one of the family, and I guess Lady Beauty and Rico are with me there."

It was not hard to induce the party to remain all night at Idlerest Ranch, and a very pleasant evening was spent, the sister and two brothers, so strangely met, getting acquainted, while handsome and young Captain Plummer was congratulating himself that the Boy Rangers were really the brothers of the beautiful "Belle Marie."

The next morning the party of men all rode to El Monte and the story of the doctor's double life and the fate of the Renegades of the Rio Grande became known.

El Monte at once put on an air of virtue, and when the troop under Captain Plummer started for the fort there was talk of sending for a parson to come and do missionary work there.

As Henrico Sanchez was in no hurry to claim his fortune, he consented to return to the Northwest with Buffalo Bill and Wild Kid, and the three set off together one fine morning.

There, at the fort where Buffalo Bill was chief of scouts, the boys found their father, colonel commanding, and he was in truth, very much pleased to hear Cody's good story of them, and said upon their return he would go with them to Texas.

This he did, and the meeting between father and daughter was, as we may well infer, an affecting one, and it was decided,

as the colonel was a man of ample means, that Marie should remain at Idlerest Ranch until he had gone East and found a home for them all, as he intended to retire from the service and enjoy his later years in the society of the children from whom a cruel fate had so long kept him apart.

While he went East, Kid Poisal, Jr., as we must now call Wild Kid, and Henrico Poisal, went to Mexico together, where the latter received his inheritance without a word being raised against it.

So it was that a year after the meeting of Buffalo Bill and his Boy Rangers, the scout again crossed their trail, this time in the elegant home in the East of Colonel Poisal, to which the great scout had been invited as a special guest for an especial occasion—which was the marriage of Belle Marie to Captain Plummer.

As for the two youths, they had given up their wild life, and, with Sable for a valet to both, they were content to live a quiet but eminently useful existence in the East, few who knew them ever dreaming of the eventful career they had led in the Lone Star State in years gone by.

THE END.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers, 98 William Street, New York.